

Citrusy goodness



DAN GOLD/UNSPLASH

Meyer lemon trees, like this, as well as Eureka lemon, Washington Navel orange, and kumquats are the easiest varieties of citrus trees for container growing in the Pacific Northwest.

Question: Is it possible to grow lemons here in Douglas County?

Answer: Ahhh, there's nothing like the sweet smell of lemon or orange blossoms floating through the air! If you have lived in California or another citrus area for any length of time, you probably remember that wonderful scent.

But is it possible to grow citrus fruit here in Douglas County? The answer is yes!

It is fun to have a potted lemon or lime tree and be able to enjoy those incredibly-fragrant flowers and some delicious fresh fruit. I have had a Meyer lemon in a large pot for over 10 years and have harvested as many as 50 lemons from that one tree.

Back in the 1940s and '50s, nurseryman Floyd Dillon, along with UC Riverside and UCLA researchers, worked with a dwarf citrus rootstock and scions (grafts) of various types of citrus, and the dwarf patio plant citrus was born.

You should buy a citrus plant which is grafted onto a dwarf rootstock instead of trying to grow one from the seed of the fruit you buy at the grocery store. Seed often doesn't come



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true to variety and you need a dwarf plant to adapt to a container situation successfully. Local nurseries will carry appropriate varieties for our area.

First, some basics. Citrus trees do not like to be cold. You will have to have some means of protecting your tree if the temperature drops below 32 degrees. Here in the Umpqua Valley, you can keep your tree outdoors most of the year if you provide winter protection.

Some gardeners leave their tree outdoors (a protected south-facing wall is ideal) until the temperatures are predicted to drop below 32 and then put them in a garage (a south-facing window is best, but no window is necessary if it's only for a few days) until the temperature goes back up above freezing.

You can bring your container into

the house and put it in a room with a south or southwest window, away from heating vents, and it will be OK for a few months.

Having your pot on a stand with wheels will be helpful, especially as your tree grows and the pots become larger. I keep mine in an unheated greenhouse all winter. There is plenty of light and I can add some extra protection if the forecast is for unusually cold weather. Keep in mind that when your tree flowers, it will need access to pollinators – unless you just want flowers and no fruit!

Citrus trees need at least six to eight hours of sunlight each day. Use a light, well-drained soil mix in your container and water so there is some dripping from drainage holes in pot. Allow the mix to dry down about 2-3 inches between watering. Try not to allow the leaves to wilt or the tree to stand in water.

Use a fertilizer designed for citrus trees and follow the directions on the label. If your tree starts dropping leaves, it might be over or under-watering or stress due to temperature extremes.

My tree has been fairly pest-free, but citrus can be prone to scale, aphids and spider mites. With minor infestations, I

have been able to remove the infected areas or do some hand-destruction of the pests (i.e., rubbing alcohol on scale). Prevention is best. A quick inspection of your tree can spot problems early and they may be able to be blasted off with your garden hose. If necessary, you might use insecticidal soap, Neem oil or horticultural oil.

The easiest varieties for container growing here in the Pacific Northwest are the improved Meyer lemon, Eureka lemon, Washington Navel orange, and kumquats.

If you enjoy the experience of picking your own fruit while having an attractive plant with those heavenly blossoms, then give one of these plants a try. With a little care regarding cold weather, life can give you lemons and you can make lemonade!

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners via email at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.