



ON THE SWEET SIDE

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Improved Meyer lemons can be grown indoors and produce fruit in winter.

Improved Meyer lemons are less tart than other varieties and can be grown indoors

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Question: I just received an improved Meyer lemon tree as a gift. What are some tips for growing these trees in our area?

Answer: The improved Meyer lemon is a hybrid of a lemon and mandarin orange. If you love lemons but find that store-bought lemons are often too tart, try the improved Meyer lemon. The fruit is round, and the skin is tinged orange, thin and edible. The flavor is sweeter and less acidic than typical lemons. They are a favorite of chefs and bakers all over the world. They bloom and bear more prolifically than most lemons as well. Don't bother looking for them in your local grocery store. These lemons are not grown commercially – you must have your own lemon tree.

Our climate in Douglas County is too cold and wet for growing your improved Meyer lemon year-round outdoors. Nevertheless, you can grow your own lemon tree at home in a pot. Move your tree outdoors in the spring after frosts are no longer a threat, usually in April, and back indoors in autumn before the first frost, usually around mid-October.

To transition plants between outside and inside, place them outdoors during the day and indoors at night for a week before moving the tree to its seasonal location. While outside, adequate light is essential. The improved Meyer lemon needs eight to 12 hours of sunlight daily. While indoors, a bright south-facing window or grow light is essential. It

is advised to provide at least six to eight hours of light during the off season. Keep in mind that when you bring your plant indoors, many of the sun-adapted leaves may drop to make way for new leaves adapted to the lower light. Then, in the spring, the process is similar when the tree goes outdoors. Then, shade adapted leaves drop to make way new, sun-adapted leaves. While indoors, keep your tree in a cool environment or it may lose its leaves.

For a new tree of 30 to 36 inches, you will need to fill a 2-foot diameter container with a light-weight potting soil mix. Be sure your container has adequate drainage. Plant the tree with its root crown slightly above the soil. Renew the soil about every three years.

Water your improved Meyer lemon regularly so that you wet the root ball completely, and allow the water to drain. Never allow the roots to sit in water. Keep the soil not too dry and not too soggy. The soil should be dry down to about 2 inches before re-watering. Signs of over watering are flower bud drop, fruit drop, and loss of leaves.

Your improved Meyer lemon tree also needs fertilizer, especially during the months when it is growing most rapidly. An acidic slow-release fertilizer or citrus fertilizer is best. In the winter, water less and do not fertilize, as an adjustment for the lower light levels.

Citrus are self-fertile, so just one plant is required for pollination. You may get more fruit if you hand pollinate, using a small paint brush to move pollen around from flower to flower. Dropping fruit can

be a sign of poor pollination. The tree is usually heavy-bearing and will provide you with a large number of lemons every year. The Meyer lemon tree fruits abundantly in the winter.

The improved Meyer lemon is naturally disease resistant. However, citrus plants are prone to some pests, namely, aphids, spider mites and scale. Aphids can be controlled by rinsing them off with a strong stream of water or applying insecticidal soap. Spider mites can be controlled by applying Mite X. The active ingredients are cottonseed and clove oils. Scale is more difficult to deal with. It can be eliminated by wiping the top and bottom of every leaf with rubbing alcohol, focusing on the area with the leaf meets the stem. Neem oil is also an effective insecticide and may prevent further infestations. Water your tree thoroughly before treatment. It is best to do any insect control before moving your tree indoors for the winter.

Your improved Meyer lemon will become your favorite houseplant because it adapts beautifully and becomes a great conversation piece. The bright-yellow fruit and sweet fragrance will catch everyone's attention. Even children love to watch the fruit grow.

Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461, or 1134 S.E. Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.