



Master Gardeners Santa Clara County

1553 Berger Dr. Bldg 1 San Jose, CA 95112
Tel 408-282-3105
www.mastergardeners.org



Growing Citrus Year Round in Santa Clara County

By Nancy Garrison

This is a great place to live for growing the widest variety of fruit anywhere on our planet. We have nearly ideal climate and soils for growing hundreds of varieties of all, but the most tropical fruits. A sample selection of different citrus for year round fruit production here follows. Washington Navel and/or Satsuma mandarin for harvest Dec. - February, Minneola tangelo and Trovita oranges for February - spring harvest, Lane's Late Navel orange for late spring through early fall harvest, - Valencia for June through September ripening. Lemons produce nearly year round and Bearss limes come ripe October through January.

Six - eight citrus can be planted in most yards without excluding everything else by incorporating into the landscape. Dwarf citrus can be planted close together in a hedgerow and kept pruned for size control. If size control isn't an issue, the only other pruning needed with citrus is to cut off errant branches as they stick out past the canopy of the tree, cutting out dead and dying branches and suckers from the rootstock.

Citrus is very adaptable to container growing in anything 5 gallons or larger only replanting every 3-4 years. Drip irrigation is preferable to hand watering citrus or any outdoor container stock because it's very difficult to **keep the soil evenly moist** during the summer months otherwise. Once potting soil dries out it becomes hydrophobic like peat moss, and can be almost impossible to re-wet. This becomes especially critical on plants that have been in the same pot for many years and have filled the pot with their thirsty roots.

It's highly recommended to incorporate a slow release fertilizer for all container culture to provide a continuous feeding throughout the year. It is not recommended to withhold fertilizer, including nitrogen, as the winter season approaches, as we once mistakenly believed. It does not help harden the plants up in preparation for cold weather. Citrus are better protected from frost damage with a year- round feeding program. Injecting small amounts of a 3-1-1-ratio fertilizer with each irrigation would be ideal, but most people aren't set up to "fertigate". During the winter, when soil temperatures are cool, slow release fertilizers such as Osmocote for container grown plants, tend to be ineffective, so it's advisable to supplement with a liquid such as Miracid, MaxSea, fish emulsion or use a slow release that it's release is not temperature sensitive.

The sweetness of oranges is not as dependent on the amount of sunlight as on the air temperature. To help you solve the commonly occurring inquiry as to why some "tangerines" are sour, check the color of the flower buds. If they are distinctly pink, they are Rangpur limes not tangerines. These make okay juice when sweetened as you would for lemonade.

Anybody who has kumquats is in for a real treat making marmalade and candied quats. I also love to make marmalade with my oranges, limes and lemons. Forget mandarins for this purpose – as their peels are flimsy and not worth bothering with. I cherish my Kieffir (or Kaffir) lime tree, which I bought so I could harvest the leaves to flavor my Asian recipes. These leaves are sold in Asian markets, lending the very distinctive flavor associated with Thai food, but may not be known to come from the leaves of this plant.

Citrus may get the following pests, including whiteflies, scale, mites, and sooty mold. Just controlling the ants often nearly eliminates the impact of all of these. Ants will literally stave off potential natural predators and parasites of the “bad guys” so the pests can feed ravenously on the plant sap and exude their sweet sticky honeydew, which is choice food for the ants. Ants can be managed by using a sticky barrier around the tree trunk or using ant stakes at the base of the tree.

We are so fortunate to be able to grow some of the most flavorful citrus in the world and I encourage you to take advantage of this fact. I like much of California’s fruit better than Florida’s because our fruit develops a nice sugar: acid balance and colors up so beautifully due to our warm days and cool nights and because of the varieties adapted to our growing conditions. Anytime from late March on, after danger of frost, is ideal for planting citrus. Pick up one of the several paperback books out on citrus from Sunset, Ortho or Ironwood Publishers to keep as a reference.