

THE GROWING OF DOORYARD CITRUS



Florida residents are blessed with a climate that lends itself to the growing of a great many kinds of fruits. Citrus is the most commonly grown and with education growing citrus can be a rewarding and fruitful experience. The Tampa Bay Rare Fruit Council encourages the planting of common and not so common Dooryard Citrus.

The Citrus family offers the Dooryard grower the advantages of easy growth, beautifully decorative plants and a bountiful yield of deliciously healthful fruit. There are citrus varieties that can be grown as dooryard fruit in every part of Florida, but the home grower should choose those varieties that have a reasonable chance of doing well in the climate area of the homestead. The Citrus choices for northern Florida growers are somewhat limited, but there is a large selection of types and varieties of citrus from which central and southern growers may choose.

Space limitation requires that any advice as to varieties, planting locations, care, and harvesting must be limited to generalizations. For more specific information the potential grower will want to consult with such sources as local plant societies, local plant nurseries specializing in citrus, the great variety of available books on citrus and the experts of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service that maintain offices in each County.

SOME DECISIONS TO BE MADE:

1. What are the varieties of citrus available that will grow well in my area of the state?
2. What kinds of citrus would be most appreciated (taste and ease of peel) by my family?
3. What are the tree sizes of various varieties and where might they fit into my landscaping?
4. What time of year will the chosen varieties mature for harvesting?
5. What types of soil would the citrus require?
6. What should I know about fertilization, trimming, insects and disease control?

The answers to these important questions should be made in consultation with some of the sources named in the previous paragraph. These are important considerations that need to be answered before purchasing the citrus trees and digging holes in which to plant them.

SOME ANSWERS:

Almost all varieties of citrus fruits can be grown in the area of central and south Florida. The Satsuma and Kumquat may be grown in north Florida if planted in warm, protected locations. In the northern parts of central Florida most varieties should be planted in protected locations (such as the south side of buildings) due to the possibility of freezing weather. Varieties can also be selected with different seasons of maturity to provide the dooryard grower with fruit over the entire season.

Some of the most popular varieties are listed below:

<u>TYPE</u>	<u>VARIETY</u>	<u>SEASON MONTHS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF SEEDS</u>	<u>GROWING AREA (FL)</u>
ORANGES	Ambersweet	Oct.-Jan.	0-30	North, Central & South
	Hamlin	Oct.-Jan.	0-6	Central & South
	Parson Brown	Oct.-Jan.	3-20	Central & South
	Pineapple	Dec.-Feb.	15-25	Central & South
	Naval	Oct.-Jan.	0-6	Central & South
	Valencia	Mar.-Jun.	0-6	Central & South
GRAPEFRUIT	Duncan	Dec.-May	30-70	Central & South

	Flame	Nov.-May	0-6	Central & South
	Marsh	Nov.-May	0-6	Central & South
	Ruby	Nov.-May	0-6	Central & South
	Thompson	Dec.-May	0-6	Central & South
TANGELO	Minneola	Dec.-Feb.	7-12	Central & South
	Orlando	Nov.-Jan.	0-35	Central & South
TANGERINE	Dancy	Dec.-Jan.	6-20	Central & South
	Murcott	Jan.-Mar.	3-20	Central & South
	Robinson	Oct.-Dec.	1-20	Central & South
	Temple	Jan.-Mar.	15-20	Central & South
MANDARIN	Ponkan	Dec.-Jan.	3-7	Central & South
	Satsuma	Sep.-Nov.	1-6	North, Central & South
TANGELO & MANDARIN Cross	Lee	Nov.-Dec.	3-25	Central & South
	Page	Oct.-Feb.	0-25	Central & South
LEMON	Bearss	Jul.-Dec.	3-8	South
	Meyer	Nov.-Mar.	10+	Central & South
	Ponderosa	Nov.-Mar.	40+	Central & South
LIME	Key (Mexican)	Everbearing	3-8	South
	Persian (Tahiti)	Sep.-Jun.	0-1	Central & South
KUMQUAT	Meiwa	Nov.-Apr.	3-5	North, Central & South
	Nagami	Nov.-Apr.	0-3	North, Central & South
PUMMELO	Hirado Buntan	Nov.-Feb.	50+	Central & South
	Sweet Siam	Nov.-Feb.	50+	Central & South
SPECIALITIES	Calamondin	Nov.-Apr.	3-5	Central & South
	Limequat	Nov.-Mar.	2-5	North, Central & South
	Finger Lime	Everbearing	2-5	Central & South

Most everyone is familiar with oranges, grapefruits, tangerine, tangelos, lemons and limes; but there are other citrus varieties worthy of attention. Kumquats are small, tasty and very ornamental trees and fruit. Calamondins look like very small oranges and are also very ornamental. Pummelos are very large fruit with thick peels. The taste is similar to grapefruit but the flesh is drier and sweeter.

The Rare Fruit Council suggests the home grower sample the fruit, if possible, before buying the tree. Budded or grafted trees should be purchased from a reputable source. Trees grown from seeds are usually slow to bear and seldom produce a satisfactory fruit crop.

Citrus trees prefer full sun but will tolerate partial shade. The planting site should be away from buildings, septic tanks and drain fields. The soil must have adequate drainage and citrus trees prefer a soil pH of 6.0 to 7.0. The tree should be planted the same depth as the soil line in its container. It is very important that the bud union not be covered. The area around the tree should be kept free of grass and weeds. Mulching is not recommended. The newly planted tree should be watered two or three times a week for the first month, then twice a week for a month and then weekly.

It is recommended that young citrus trees be fed four times a year with a complete fertilizer (such as a citrus special or 6-6-6) which includes minor elements. Newly planted trees should not be fertilized until new growth appears. The first application should be made in late February and the last application should be made in September. Fertilizer should be spread over a cleared area starting about 6 inches from the tree trunk. During the second and third years each tree may be fed with two pounds of fertilizer at each feeding. Thereafter, one pound of fertilizer per each foot of tree spread can be used three times a year. Trees can be sprayed with nutritional sprays to keep them healthy.

Pruning is usually limited to removing suckers and dead wood. Newly planted citrus trees should be checked often for insects and diseases. The home grower should consult his local County Extension or other reliable source for identification and recommendations for control.

In addition to eating the fruit fresh, it can be used in salads, juices, canning, baking, jams jellies, and marmalades. Citrus peel and even whole Kumquats are delicious when candied.

Dooryard Citrus trees provide the home grower with attractive foliage, white blossoms that smell wonderful and fruit that have a beautiful color and a wide variety of flavors. In addition, citrus fruits are a perfect nutritional choice.

- **Charles Novak**

