



Growing, Caring For, and Protecting Citrus in San Antonio

When to plant citrus:

David Rodriguez, County Extension Agent-Horticulture for Bexar County, recommends that you keep your citrus in a pot for the first 3-4 years, to where it develops bark, before planting it in the ground.

Plant in Spring: Because citrus is tropical to subtropical, some recommend planting in spring to avoid planting when freeze can damage or kill your plant. Protecting your citrus throughout winter is crucial, whether grown in a container or in the ground. (See info at end citrus guide)

-Garden centers receive citrus shipments in fall so availability is great at this time of the year. Keep your citrus in pots as recommended and you can easily keep them protected from freeze by bring them inside

Extra attention to irrigation must be addressed when planted in spring, to carry the citrus through hot temperatures of late spring and summer.

Light:

Citrus needs to be planted in all day, full sun areas.

-Citrus that is not setting blooms might be in too much shade.

Soil:

Citrus needs well-draining soil.

-Well-draining soil is soil that is able to completely drain within a 24-36 hour period.

-Improve soil drainage by adding 4"-6" of compost or peat moss/aged sawdust to the soil.

Citrus needs deep soil to allow for root growth.

-Use your current landscape trees as an indicator if your soil is deep enough. If they are healthy, you most likely have the depth of soil required for citrus to thrive.

-For those with shallow soils, opt for growing citrus in raised beds or [containers](#) that are at least 1 and ½ feet in diameter.

Citrus prefers soil with a pH range of 6-8.

Spacing:

Allow about 16 feet spacing when planting multiple citrus trees

-Allow 6-8 feet spacing when planting near houses, buildings, fences, sidewalks, etc...

Planting:

Dig your planting hole twice as wide as the rootball of your citrus, but only as deep as the rootball (no deeper).

-Use a straight stick or shovel handle and lay it across the hole and rootball to make sure you have the correct depth.

Set citrus tree in hole, keeping trunk perpendicular to make sure tree is straight. Backfill hole halfway, water to settle soil around roots, then finish filling in soil and tamp lightly to secure.

Watering:

Water **new citrus trees** thoroughly 1-3 times the first week, 1-2 times a week for a few weeks (in lieu of sufficient rainfall). Then water when top of soil is dry a couple inches down (like established citrus below).

-Be sure to water thoroughly, all the way out to the drip line (where the canopy extends out to)

Established citrus trees need 1"-2" of water weekly during the growing season (early spring through summer).

-Water when top few inches of soil are dry, but area by root zone is still moist.

-Stick finger into soil to check for moisture or use a moisture meter.

Fertilizing:

Wait to fertilize **newly planted citrus** trees until new growth develops, then fertilize monthly until November with a nitrogen fertilizer. (Do this for the first year after planting.)

For **established citrus**, It is recommended to offer citrus two doses of high nitrogen fertilizer, once in early spring and again in early summer.

- Do not feed citrus after November to avoid pushing tree into new growth that could be damaged by freeze.

Pruning:

Citrus does not need generally need much pruning.

- Most pruning that is done is to remove twiggy or weak growth, and broken or diseased limbs.
- Limbs should be allowed to naturally droop towards the ground when laden with fruit.

Extra Care:

Keep citrus trees a weed free zone by mulching.

- Keep mulch a foot away from the citrus tree trunk.
- The first 3-4 years is most crucial to keep weeds from competing for nutrients and water.

Winter Protection for Citrus:

All citrus can be damaged at temps of 28° or lower (citrus in containers can be damaged at even higher temperatures).

- A quick dip into freezing temperatures that doesn't last too long does not inflict as much damage as a freeze that continues for several hours.

However, citrus are tropical to subtropical and **ALL** citrus can be susceptible to freeze damage or death; so having a winter protection plan is essential.

Citrus Listed in Order of Sensitivity to Freeze:

- Lemons (except Meyer Lemon) and Limes most sensitive
- Oranges, Grapefruit, Mandarins and Hybrids less sensitive
- Satsumas, Calamondins, Kumquats, Meyer Lemon least sensitive

Protecting Citrus Through Winter:

-Remove mulch from the ground around citrus before winter so that the ground can absorb the heat from the sun directly.

-Pay attention to predicted freeze dates on the news.

Water citrus thoroughly a few days before a predicted freeze. Moist soil absorbs and conducts heat better than dry soil.

-If the tree is not too tall, the tops should be covered and anchored with blankets, quilts, cloth tarps, or commercially bought freeze cloth.

-Do not place plastic covers directly on citrus tops. Always use cloth first and then plastic if desired.

-Cover citrus the afternoon before a freeze.

-Remove covers on sunny days when danger of freeze has passed. You may have to cover and uncover throughout the week. (Commercially bought freeze cloth usually allows for enough air to pass through so you don't have to remove them).

-If you experience freeze damage, wait to prune damaged areas until May after spring growth and when you can really assess the extent of the damage.

-Citrus in containers can be brought in to sunny garages for winter protection until danger of freeze has passed. These portable plants can be wheeled back out on warmer sunny days.