

CITRUS CARE

Citrus trees are very like roses. Treat them well and they will reward you. Forget about them and they will 'spit the dummy'! Now is the perfect time to begin pampering them.

Citrus love good drainage and our clay soils need help. When planting new trees, lay a few wet pages of newspaper on ground. Say a meter diameter to start with then pile on some good mulch. They also have very shallow surface-feeding roots and that means it's important to keep any competition away from the base of the tree - especially grass. The trees are mulched with lucerne, sugar-cane or home-grown compost.

Feeding

- Every spring, water your trees with trace elements.
- Twice a year, in spring and summer, water in iron chelates. The iron stops the leaves from yellowing and dropping off.
- Four times a year, every season, apply certified organic poultry manure at a rate of one handful per square metre.
- Every fortnight, feed your trees using either seaweed or a flower and fruit fertiliser.
- DO NOT feed citrus while they're in flower. If you do, you'll get lots of beautiful leaves, but very few fruit.

Citrus Problems

- Common citrus problems include aphids and leaf miners on new growth, scale insects on old leaves, and black sooty mould on the fruit and foliage. The good news is, one organic remedy can control all these problems. Apply white oil once every three weeks for three months during spring. Be sure to cover the whole tree including the bark.
- Cut off all galls from new growth and put them in the rubbish bin. The wasps will by now have left the gall on last seasons stems so no need to cut them off. This should be done by the end of August.
- Like roses and camelias, citrus trees can become congested with years of old growth. Remove all the dead wood, criss-crossing branches and spindly growth. This opens up the tree, and encourages good air flow and allows sunlight to penetrate through to the lower branches. This discourages attack by mites and encourages better fruiting. I like to prune to a height where I can reach all fruit...no ladders.