



## Growing citrus indoors

### Quick facts

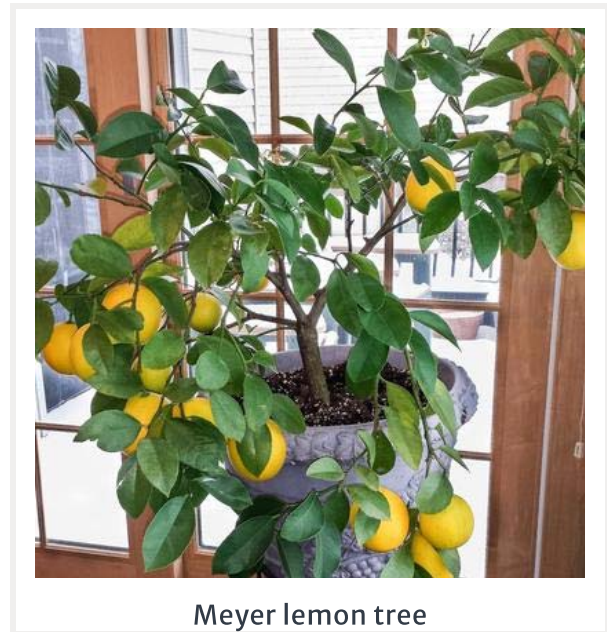
- Tangerine, lemon, kumquat and small orange trees can be grown as houseplants.
- Citrus plants grow best indoors at 65° during the day, dropping five to ten degrees at night.
- Plant in soil containing a fair amount of organic matter.
- Make sure the leaves are kept clean by periodically washing them.
- Stem cuttings root easily.

Lemons in Minnesota? This idea is not so far-fetched if you consider growing certain citrus plants indoors. The flowers and fruit can be fragrant and attractive.

Most varieties of citrus grown commercially in warm climates are too large to be grown indoors. But there are many small or dwarf varieties that can grow well as potted plants. Even in our cold winters.

Growing citrus plants is not difficult. Getting the plants to bear luscious tropical fruits is another story.

It may be better to simply consider your citrus a nice houseplant that might produce fruit as a bonus.



Meyer lemon tree

### Selecting plants

There are several species that make good houseplants when cared for properly.

- The calamondin orange (*Citrofortunella mitis*) is the most common species grown indoors.
  - Its fruits are small and sour but can be used for marmalade or as a garnish in summer drinks.
- The Otaheite orange (*Citrus limonia*) is not actually an orange. It is a dwarf, spineless cross between a lemon and a tangerine.
- Tangerines (*Citrus reticulata*) can also be grown indoors.
  - Satsuma oranges, which are really tangerines, are particularly good and have abundant fragrant flowers.

- There are two varieties of lemon which may be used as houseplants, 'Ponderosa' and 'Meyer'.
- Citron (*Citrus medica*) and kumquat (*Fortunella* species) can also be grown indoors.

## Growing and caring for your citrus plants

Growing citrus plants is not difficult if you can meet these requirements.

- Citrus plants grow best indoors with 65° days, dropping five to ten degrees at night.
- They need some direct sun for at least part of the day.
- During the summer, put citrus plants outside to take advantage of better growing conditions and extra light.
  - Let the plants acclimate to sunny conditions by putting them in the shade of a tree or the north side of the house for the first several days.
  - Make sure they have plenty of direct light once they're used to being outside.
  - Get them used to lower light at the end of the summer by keeping them in a shady place for a week or so before bringing them back indoors.

## Use the right potting mix and fertilizer

- Since citrus plants prefer acid conditions, use peat in the potting mix to help keep the pH down.
- Use about one-third sterile potting soil, one-third perlite or vermiculite, and one-third peat or other organic matter in the potting mix.
- Use a fertilizer made specially for acid-loving plants. Mix at half the recommended strength.
- Fertilize the plant only when it is actively growing, usually April through August or September.

## Watch for pests

- **Scale**, **whitefly** and **spider mites** are some of the more common pests of citrus.
- Make sure the leaves are kept clean by periodically washing them.
  - Pay special attention to the undersides as well as the tops of leaves.
- To treat insects, check garden centers for products currently approved for use on houseplants.

## Pollinate for fruit

You may have flowers, but still have difficulty getting fruit to form on your citrus plant. This may be due to lack of pollination.

Insects pollinate citrus outside. Since these are not usually present in the home, shake the flowers gently or flick them with your fingers to spread pollen from flower to flower.

## Propagate new plants

Stem cuttings root easily.

- Use new shoots which have been allowed to harden just a little. Hardened shoots have a little substance to them. Don't use shoots that are still buttery soft.
- Take cuttings in the spring or summer when the plants are growing most actively.
- Root the cuttings in fresh potting mix, keeping them slightly moist.
- Repot when new roots reach a length of one inch or so.
- Seeds also grow quite easily, though they will usually not grow plants exactly like the parent.
  - Plants grown from seed seldom get large enough to flower and fruit.
  - Growing citrus from seeds is a good children's project.
  - Using the same potting mix as you would for cuttings, place seeds about one-fourth inch below the surface of the mix.
  - Keep the potting soil moist.

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*Reviewed in 2018*

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