

Annette McFarlane's Citrus Guide

Varieties for South East Queensland

Lemon

'**Lots of Lemons**' – cutting grown variety is great for pots (do not plant into the ground), but fruit is prone to fruit fly

'**Meyer**' – grafted variety around 2.5m high and suitable for pots or gardens, but like the related 'Lots of Lemons', can be prone to fruit fly

'**Eureka**' – tall growing (4-6m high), winter bearing, but produces some fruit almost year round in SE Qld

Bush – seed grown, highly variable generally with thick skin and lots of seeds. May or may not have much juice, but incredibly tough and easy care

'**Villa Franca**' – tall growing (4-6m high), winter bearing with some summer and autumn fruit

'**Lisbon**' – tall growing (4-6m high), winter bearing with fruit that stores well for a long period.

'**Fino**' – vigorous grower (4-6m high), thorny, seedless, winter bearing, but has some fruit year round.

Lime

Native/Finger Limes – Buy grafted varieties. Fruit is produced in late summer - winter bearing. Very hardy. Includes 'Rainforest Pearl', 'Red Centre' round lime and many others. Very hardy.

'**Tahitian**' – This mild flavoured selection does well in our climate. Grafting on to a rough lemon rootstock produces a large tree and early crop, while *Poncirus trifoliata* rootstock gives a smaller, late harvest tree. If cutting grown and not grafted, be sure to keep them in pots.

'**West Indian Lime**' (Mexican or Key Lime) - is better suited to the tropics, but can be grown in SE Queensland. It may be seed, cutting grown or grafted. Grafted selections fair better in our climate.

'Sublime' is a cutting grown (non-grafted) form of West Indian lime best grown in a pot.

Orange

'**Valencia**' – Great eating or juicing grafted orange

'**Seedless Valencia**' - A grafted, seedless form of Valencia that is slightly later fruiting

'**Joppa**' – A commercial juicing orange, that bears fruit after the Valencia crops have finished bearing. If room permits, plant 'Joppa' and 'Seedless Valencia' for six months of fruit harvest in S.E. Queensland.

'**Arnold Blood Orange**' – Popular red fleshed orange primarily used for juicing.

'**Navel**' (various) – Traditional eating orange.

Poor Man's Orange – seed grown, selected hybrid pummelo with a taste more like a sweet grapefruit.

Mandarin (If room permits, plant an early, mid and late season variety for an extended harvest.

Varieties in bold indicate great selections for Brisbane)

Early season varieties include 'Clementine', 'Daisy', '**Imperial**', '**Okitsu Wase**', 'Satsuma'

Mid season varieties include 'Dancy', '**Hickson**'

Late season varieties – 'Afourer', '**Avana Tardivo**', 'Ellendale', '**Honey Murcott**'

Grapefruit

'**Flame**' (fewer seeds than Ruby or Red Blush) – A popular breakfast-sized grapefruit with red flesh. Thicker skinned (pest resistant) and less tart than yellow skinned varieties.

'**Ruby Red**' or '**Red Blush**' - Popular breakfast-sized grapefruit with red flesh. Thicker skinned (pest resistant), and less tart than yellow skinned varieties. *Please note that all red fleshed grapefruit grown in S.E Qld may not colour to quite the same extent as those grown in other climates.*

'**Thompson Seedless**' – Traditional thin-, yellow-skinned variety, but more subject to fruit fly than red fleshed varieties.

'**Marsh Seedless**' – Traditional thin-, yellow-skinned variety with enormous fruit, but more subject to fruit fly than red fleshed varieties.

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Planting and Looking After Your Citrus Trees In South East Queensland

Planting and Soil Preparation

All citrus require perfect drainage. To test if your soil is sufficiently well-drained to plant a citrus tree, dig a hole at least 45cm deep. Pour a bucket of water into the hole. If the water takes more than 20 minutes to drain away you may have a drainage issue. Check different sites around the garden if drainage in one site proves poor or consider planting your tree in a container. A small growing variety or plant grafted on to a dwarfing rootstock requires a pot that holds a minimum of 100 litres of mix. A 200 litre container will support a full sized tree.

If your soil is well drained, enrich it with decomposed animal manure or home made compost. Ensure this material is well broken down prior to planting. Ideally you should prepare the planting area 4-6 weeks prior to planting to ensure that you do not burn the roots.

Fertilising

All citrus are hungry feeders. Fertilise citrus trees planted in the ground 3-4 times each year and potted citrus 6 times each year. Use a citrus and fruit tree fertiliser and follow the application rate recommended by the manufacturer. Avoid fertilising trees when they are in flower as this can tend to encourage flowers to abort. Liquid fertiliser can be applied at any time to boost growth. Citrus have a high demand for trace elements, but fruit tree fertilisers will tend to contain the extra trace elements that citrus require.

Mulching

Citrus benefit from mulching. Just ensure that the mulch does not come in contact with the stem. The mulch should spread out on the ground to the full extent of the foliage canopy or drip line. Cane mulch, leaf litter, compost or spoilt lucerne may be used.

Pruning

Citrus trees do not require heavy annual pruning, in fact, this can be detrimental to them in subtropical climate. Citrus require initial formative pruning to shape the tree in the first few years of growth. Remove the fruit when pea-sized on an immature tree to help it become established (first 1-2 years). Harvest your fruit using secateurs, removing fruit stalks and any twiggy or dead growth at the same time. Clean up trees of any thin, spindly growth at any time of year.

If you want to keep trees small, buy a tree grafted on to a dwarfing rootstock in the first instance or grow a pot variety. Trim excessively tall growths to reduce tree height, but remember that regular pruning throughout the year to keep trees small will result in a poor harvest or complete absence of fruit.

Pest Control

Scale, sooty mould and leaf miner

Scale insects and sooty mould are major pests of citrus. Fortunately, they can be controlled organically using plant based oil sprays like Eco-oil. Oils sprays will also deter the citrus leaf miner moth from laying eggs on the leaves. The larvae of these moths create the silvery trails and distorted leaves. They are particularly common on lemons and mandarin trees. Apply oil sprays to your citrus three to four times each year, particularly when trees are young. Citrus leaf miner on potted trees can be controlled by squeezing affected leaves between your thumb and forefinger to squash the larvae.

Citrus gall wasp

Lumps on the young stems of citrus trees indicate attack by the citrus gall wasp. This wasp lays its eggs within the young stems and the swelling occurs as a result of the larvae feeding inside the stem. To control this pest, prune off the swollen stems prior to the emergence of the adult wasp at the end of July. There is no need to prune out old galls from previous seasons as larvae are no longer present in these galls.

Fruit fly

Fruit fly can sting citrus with some lemons, mandarins and thin skinned grapefruit being particularly susceptible. Set out fruit fly bait traps (like Eco-naturalure) and consider using fruit fly bags (or even paper bags) to protect fruit if fruit fly is a particularly bad in your area. Pick up and destroy infected fruit to minimise larvae pupating in the soil beneath trees. Mulch thickly around trees. To dispose of fruit fly infected fruit, place the fruit in a heat proof container. Pour boiling water over the fruit until it is completely covered. Leave to cool. Pour the water on the garden and compost or bury the fruit.

Stink bugs

Smelly, stink bugs feed on the new growth of citrus. Young insects are green, gradually change colour to orange, then mature to large, hard-shelled black bugs. Regular use of all sprays (Eco-oil) should keep them under control. Where adult insects are found, apply Eco-neem or suck them up with an old vacuum cleaner. Take care to avoid contact as stink bugs secrete an acrid substance that can burn the skin and cause eye damage.

For more information:

Tune in Gardening Talkback on ABC radio 612 in Brisbane each Saturday morning from 6-7am.

Log on to www.annettemcfarlane.com to hear podcasts of Gardening Talkback (any time of the day or night).

Read Annette McFarlane's gardening column each week in the Sunday Mail.