

Growing Citrus in Colorado

A basic guide to caring for citrus plants in Colorado



Citrus provides fragrant blooms and edible fruit, and some even have fragrant, edible leaves. In Colorado, they perform best as a patio plant, outside during the summer and inside during the fall and winter.

Temperature

Citrus is considered subtropical, and requires warm days in the summer (70°- 90°F). They also need 6-10 weeks of winter dormancy (below 60° at night, but never below 45°F).

Light

In the summer, provide at least 4-6 hours of direct, unfiltered sunlight. In the winter, place in a bright location with as much direct sun as possible, but be sure not to keep near drafty or poorly insulated windows, as cold air can damage foliage. A southern facing window is best. Without sufficient natural light, full spectrum artificial light can be helpful.

Watering

Be sure the top 1/3 of the soil is allowed to dry each time before you water. When you water, give the soil a thorough soaking. Never allow the plant to sit in water for more than a couple of hours. Be especially careful not to overwater in the winter months. *Note* - Citrus plants can be sensitive to chlorine and fluoride in water supply. Allow containers of water to sit overnight before using, or use filtered water.

Pot Size

We do not recommend repotting citrus plants immediately. Plants are sold in pots that are their best fit. The only reason you should transplant is if you find that the soil is drying out quickly, or it seems to be overgrowing its pot. If either of these are the case, it may be time to transplant into a pot one size larger (2" larger in diameter at the most).

Humidity

Citrus trees often have a hard time with Colorado's low humidity levels. Putting the plant outside in the summer

At a Glance

Temperature: Subtropical; 70-90° in summer; 6-10 weeks dormancy in winter, night temp. below 60°, never below 45°

Light: Minimum 4-6 hours direct sunlight daily in summer; in winter, as much direct sunlight as possible indoors.

Water: Water deeply once top 1/3 of soil has dried. Do not allow to sit in water. Sensitive to chlorine & fluoride; allow tap water to sit overnight or use filtered water.

Humidity: Try using a pebble tray with a small amount of water, making sure plants do not sit in water. You may also mist undersides of leaves.

Soil: Good quality, well-drained.

Fertilizer: Feed about every other watering only while actively growing.

can help in some cases. In the winter months when the air is particularly dry, create humidity by putting the plant on a pebble tray or saucer that is at least four inches larger than the base of the pot, filling with small gravel and water. Be sure the plant doesn't sit directly in the water. Misting the undersides of the leaves can also be helpful.

Insects

If you plan on eating the fruit, infestations should be treated organically. Citrus is susceptible to a host of infestations. Spider mites, mealy bugs, and aphids are the most common. If an infestation occurs, physical removal of the insect is most effective. Prune off the most affected portions and wash the plant gently with soap and water. If needed, spray the plant with a food safe insecticide such as Neem.

Acclimation

Citrus plants don't have an easy time being relocated. You'll see yellowing leaves followed by shedding of those leaves. You will need to slowly acclimate your plant to its new location by placing the plant in the new spot for about 1 hour at a time, slowly increasing the amount of time in the new spot each day. This is especially important in the spring when the tree is getting used to full sun. Full sun can burn the leaves if it isn't acclimated.

When moving the plant indoors in the fall, it will get considerably less light and will not be able to support the growth it put on during the summer. Before the tree is brought indoors prune the plant back by at least 1/3rd. This will help the plant acclimate to lower light. You should see new growth within a couple of weeks.

Remember to check the tree's soil more often for moisture in the summer, as it will go through water faster in higher light. Back off watering in lower light conditions in the winter, as it will use less water. Just remember the 1/3rd rule.

Fertilizer

Feed your tree only while it is actively growing. We recommend using organic fertilizers when possible. Citrus trees are susceptible to burning from fertilizers and using organic fertilizers is easier on roots.

We recommend fertilizing every other time you water. Water the plant before fertilizing only if the soil is bone dry and mix the fertilizer at half the strength of the manufacturer's recommendation on the package.

You can determine nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium content in a fertilizer by three hyphenated numbers found on all fertilizer packages. The first number is nitrogen content, the second is phosphorus, and the third number is potassium. Nitrogen (N) helps the growth of the leaves (think green), phosphorus (P) is for roots and blooms and potassium (K) is for fruit and the overall health and vitality of the plant. You can eliminate some confusion by using an all-purpose fertilizer (with all three major nutrients) every other time you water. After about three feedings, use a bloom booster (high phosphorus), and the next time return to the original all-purpose fertilizer.

Soil

You should use good quality, well-draining soil and maintain its original soil depth. If the soil erodes from watering, you can add more to the top to bring it back to its original level. Citrus likes slightly acidic soil. Keep in mind that our water in Colorado is mostly alkaline.