

Choose a citrus tree



'Nagami' cumquat

The trifecta of sweetly-scented white flowers, glowing edible fruits and glossy green leaves make citrus one of the best evergreen shrubs for Australian gardens.

Most are native to South East Asia and were introduced to the Middle East and Europe in the time of the Romans.

Citrus fruits, flowers and leaves tree have many useful parts. The aromatic rind of the fruits are squeezed for oil which is used in cosmetic, food, medicine and cleaning industries. Flowers of the bitter orange blossoms produce perfumed neroli oil; the leaves of some varieties are used in cooking and the delicious flesh and juice of the fruit, which are said to stimulate the digestion, are eaten fresh and turned into jams.

Late autumn and winter is the peak fruiting time for citrus.

Provide citrus trees with a sunny position, plenty of water, regular fertiliser and twice yearly sprays of trace elements for the rewards of sweet, plentiful fruits.

Cumquat

This is the smallest growing citrus and varieties include 'Calamondin', 'Meiwa', the oval fruited 'Nagami', which can be

eaten skin and all, and ornamental variegated leafed varieties. They are excellent for pots, though most citrus can be grown this way if the pot is big enough.

Grapefruit

Grapefruit originated in Barbados in the 18th century and are named because the fruit hangs in clusters. 'Marsh's' an almost seedless white-fleshed variety is one favourite but look out for pink or red fleshed grapefruit which colour best and become sweetest in tropical areas where temperatures continue to be warm in the evenings.

Lemon

There was a time when every back yard had a lemon tree – usually the thornless 'Eureka' variety, which fruits and flowers all year round.

'Meyer' is a smaller growing lemon with a less acidic flavour and its sport includes 'Lots A' Lemons' a dwarf variety with full sized fruits suited to small gardens and pots .



Tahitian lime

Limes

The small deep-green limes with pale green flesh, known as West Indian limes, are native to Malaysia and are more cold sensitive than the Tahitian lime, growing best in tropical areas. Although named as a specie, the Tahitian lime it is thought to be a cross between the west Indian lime and either a lemon or grapefruit. Fruit should be picked when green rather than left to turn yellow. It

grows well in warmer parts of the garden in southern Australia in a sheltered position with full sun.

It is the aromatic leaves and not the fruit of the kaffir lime, a thorny native bush of Indonesia, which is used to flavour Asian food, especially curries. If you run out the young leaves of any citrus make a satisfactory substitute.

Australian native citrus come from rain forest regions and are straggly, sometimes thorny plants with intensely flavoured fruits.

Orange

The two most popular oranges are the late fruiting 'Valencia' used for juice and marmalade and the sweet Washington navel orange which is still one of the very best eating oranges. The small growing 'Navelina' is a recommended variety.

Blood oranges are also available but tend to colour best in warm areas.

Tangelo

My favourite citrus of all is the tangelo, which is a cross between a mandarin and grapefruit and has tart yet sweet flesh. The two most common varieties are 'Minneola' which has a bell shape with pronounced neck, few seeds and medium to big fruit and the heavy cropping and juicy 'Seminole'.

Mandarins

Mandarins are king of the school lunchbox because they are small, sweet and easy to peel. The most popular early fruiting variety is the 'Imperial' and many gardeners also like growing the later fruiting 'Murcott'.

When picking the fruits use sharp secateurs and cut back the stem by several centimetres to encourage new fruiting wood.