

October 23, 2014



Citrus

By Paula Bertram

UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

The voice on the phone was tentative: “Hello, is this the Master Gardener?” “Well, I’m one of the Master Gardeners. My name is Petunia” (name changed to protect the author). “Did you have a question?” Anguished voice: “I think my mandarin tree is dying!” Racing thoughts on the MG’s end -- Master Gardener to self: “I don’t know much about citrus;” and, “Why did I sign up for phone duty?” And “She’s going to think I’m a blithering idiot if I don’t say something soon!” Master Gardener aloud in assumed comforting tone: “Tell me more . . .”

The story has a happy ending. The mandarin’s leaves were yellowing. The caller was able to send a photo of the shrub. After some further questions of the caller (“Are the leaves overall yellow or stippled?” Answer: “Overall yellow”), and surreptitious consultation with a more knowledgeable Master Gardener, it turned out the mandarin’s owner was over-watering. Dear readers, you know the instinct: the plant doesn’t look right, so you apply more water. In this case, the remedy was simple. Less frequent irrigation.

But Master Gardener Petunia was troubled in spirit. She knew she needed to remediate her knowledge deficit and study up on citrus.

Here’s the really great news. Citrus will thrive in much of our foothill environment. Pick the right variety and a favorable spot in your garden and you will be enjoying delicious citrus fruit and a handsome tree or shrub for many years.

Do you like Meyer Lemons (who doesn’t)? They are a cross between a conventional lemon and a sweet orange. Cold tolerant, almost thornless, bearing fruit for months at a time and they grow well in containers. Imagine a spreading evergreen lemon bush in a pot next to your kitchen door. Guacamole, lemonade, sweet smelling blossoms -- what’s not to like?

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Or consider mandarins or tangerines. They come in small and medium sized trees. You will get lovely, easy-peel sweet fresh fruit in the winter months. Some varieties are freeze-resistant down to 25 degrees Fahrenheit.

Location, Location, Location: one of the most important considerations in growing citrus. Place them where they will get at least 8 hours of sun daily. Backed up to the south side of a house or a stone wall, they will thrive with reflected heat and frost protection during cold winter months. Avoid planting them near a competing tree or large shrub. If planted near a lawn, make sure the sprinklers will not wet the trunk.

Intrigued? Plan to attend this Saturday's November 1st free UCCE Master Gardener and Master Food Preserver class: Citrus Mania. Learn more about freeze-resistant citrus varieties and frost protection. Early identification and intervention of citrus problems will be covered. Best of all, unique recipes about how to use and safely preserve your upcoming citrus harvest will be shared. Class is from 9:00 am to noon at the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, in Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado are available to answer home gardening questions in their office at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville from Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon. Walk-ins are welcome, or call [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.