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Citrus in the Home Garden
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What do you look forward to eating in the winter months? Could it be tangy, sweet, tart citrus? Many of these delicious, evergreen fruit trees can be successfully grown in areas of our county creating a beautiful-year round view, and delectable fruit full of vitamin C.

Choosing citrus for your garden will depend on your favorites and winter temperatures in your garden. Citrus varieties have varying degrees of cold tolerance, which is based on the number of hours a tree sits at its lowest tolerated temperature. Varieties that do best in our area from least to most cold tolerant are: Eureka or Meyer lemons tolerate to 32 degrees; Bearss Lime, Washington Navel and Oro Blanco Grapefruit are to 28 degrees, many varieties of Mandarins tolerate to 25 degrees, and Kumquats tolerate down to 22 degrees. It's best to plant your citrus in a higher area in your garden as within several hundred feet temperatures can vary six to ten degrees depending on microclimates.

Most citrus today are grown on rootstock that is a different variety than what you hope to eat. This provides for height control and disease resistance. Dwarf trees are easier to care for, do well in pots or raised beds, have increased cold tolerance, and Phytophthora root rot is less of a problem with today's rootstocks. Growing citrus in pots allows you to move the plant closer to radiant walls or into the house on the coldest nights.

Knowing your area's soil is important. Citrus likes well-draining soils. Areas of El Dorado Hills, Cameron Park, Rescue and Shingle springs are too rocky with clay soils for citrus to do well. In these neighborhoods, plant your citrus in pots or in raised beds using light, well-draining soil. Always plant citrus in the spring where there is full sunlight. The hole should be as deep and wide or wider than the root ball. Keep the grafted union above the soil line and allow for settling of the soil. Create a basin and water thoroughly after planting.

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Even, regular watering is important for blossom set and tree health. However, don't be alarmed if many blossoms drop; citrus is self-thinning. Citrus trees only require pruning growth below the root graft or suckers that are slower to grow fruit.

Young citrus trees have different nitrogen needs than fully-bearing mature trees. A tablespoon of a nitrogen-bearing fertilizer can be spread every four weeks and then watered in under young trees. Mature trees need one to three pounds of nitrogen per year around the drip line divided into three applications in the spring, summer and early fall. Always check the label and follow directions.

During freezing temperatures that will test your varieties' cold tolerance: water the ground thoroughly, remove mulch from under the tree, wrap young tree trunks with cardboard or insulating material, and tent the tree with row cover or non plastic material so that the fabric does not rest on the leaves. On very cold nights, citrus trees may need incandescent lights (C7 or C9) draped throughout the foliage.

Additional information on growing citrus trees may be found at http://homeorchard.ucanr.edu/Fruits_&_Nuts/Citrus/.

Join UCCE Master Gardeners Walt Miller and Pam Lane today for a free class: Backyard Fruit and Citrus Trees. How to plant and care for your fruit trees to ensure maximum fruit production will be covered in detail, as well as information on which varieties of trees do best in our climate. Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at the Cameron Park Community Center, 2502 Country Club Drive in Cameron Park.

Join UCCE Master Gardener Phyllis Lee and Master Food Preserver Mike Pizza this Saturday, Nov 7th for the popular and fun Citrusmania free class. Where, and how to grow and care for beautiful citrus trees will be presented, as well how to preserve your harvest and make many delicious citrus treats. Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon in the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Court in Placerville.

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