

## Grow Meyer Lemons In Pots

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Nov. 17, 2018

**Q.** I was given a Meyer lemon in a pot as a housewarming gift. Do they grow well here? Should I keep it in a pot or plant it in the ground? How do I take care of it?

**A.** Meyer lemons are my favorite type of lemon. Their fruit is has thin skins and they're less tart than other lemon varieties.

Originally brought over from China in the early 1900, the Meyer lemon was found to carry a virus that killed off millions of citrus, so it was banned in California. In 1975 the University of California released the disease resistant "improved Meyer lemon" which is the tree we grow today. Thought to be a cross between a mandarin orange and a regular lemon, it's more tolerant of cold than other varieties of lemon and will produce well here if you live in a warm area — for example, on a ridge on the west side — or can plant in a protected spot, such as one near enough to your house to be warmed by it.



(Photo: Sharon Rigsby)

You can keep it in a large pot and place the pot on a coaster with wheels. This is a nice option because you can then move it into the garage or other protected area on the coldest nights. If you want to plant into the ground find a protected place and dig a hole as deep as the root ball and at least twice its diameter. Since citrus do not like their roots disturbed, place the pot in the hole and slit it on two sides, so the root ball can be eased out without damage. Backfill gently with the native soil, not with amendments, so the tree's roots can acclimate as quickly as possible. Do not cover the root ball with additional soil. Citrus are sensitive to soil depth change around their roots and may defoliate. Water thoroughly so that soil around the roots settles. You may have to continue to water, even in winter, every two weeks or so if the weather's dry. Use a probe — a long bladed screwdriver will do — to tell if the soil's dry before watering, as over-watering can cause leaf yellowing or leaf drop.

Protect the trunk and large limbs from sunburn; lemons are especially susceptible to sunburn. Wrap tree trunk and larger limbs with newspaper or tree wrap or paint with a light colored 50/50 mixture of interior latex paint and water.

The Meyer lemon tree can take some cold but you will need to protect it from freezing if temperatures drop below 23 degrees. To do this you can build tripods of light lumber or PVC pipe around trees and cover them with frost cloth or tarps on the coldest nights. Another option is to hang the trees with the old-fashioned Christmas lights and turn them on when freezing nights are predicted; but note that LED Christmas tree lights won't work, since they're cool burning and won't give off sufficient heat.

Unlike oranges and grapefruit which should be fertilized only in the spring, lemon trees should be fertilized a least three times per year: Spring, summer and early fall). Use a citrus or fruit-and-flower fertilizer and follow the directions on the bag for the amount to apply according to the size of your tree.