Lemons, Limes and Limequats

Care of Lemon, Lime and Limequat Trees
The following information on care of citrus applies to lemons, limes and limequats:

**Planting:** Citrus trees that are purchased in fall or winter need to be kept in the pots until late March or when all danger of freeze has passed. Do not plant these trees before late March or they will very likely die in the winter freezes. Bring them into the garage or house if there is going to be a frost and take them back out after the frost. Plant them in an area that receives at least ½ day of sun. If possible, plant them on the south side of a house or building or where they will get a lot of protection from winter winds. Citrus do not require full sun as most other fruit trees, however the more sun the more production of fruit. Plant them in existing soil without amenities, and make sure the graft is a couple of inches above the soil line. Water every few days while in pots unless it rains. Test the soil in the pot by pushing your finger into the soil. If it is dry an inch down, it is time to water. When planted in the ground, water every day for a few days and then back off to once a week unless it rains.

**Fertilizing:** Do not fertilize the first spring, but you could fertilize with an organic fertilizer such as Microlife once during the first summer. In the next spring and summer, you can fertilize a couple of times.

**Care:** Citrus do not need to be pruned, but you could prune them if they get too big and in the way. And you can prune them on the top to keep them to a height for easy harvesting. You are likely to notice the new growth leaves start to curl. This is citrus leaf miner which is a leaf miner that affects the new leaves of most citrus. You can spray NEEM Oil on the new growth (both sides of leaves), and repeat a week later. This may stop the leaf miner, and it may not. The tree will still grow and produce even though the leaf miner attacks the leaves; but the tree will be more productive and healthier if the leaf miner is prevented.

**Cold Tolerance:** Some citrus have very good cold tolerance down to 22 degrees and some even to 10 degrees; but most can be damaged by freezes especially when they are young. In the first couple of years, if there is going to be a freeze, protect the plant by covering with a blanket with a large bucket of water sitting right next to the plant and under the blanket. Also pile mulch or leaves around the base of the tree to protect the graft. In this way, if the tree freezes, it will come right back.
After the freeze, remove the blanket and pull back the mulch or leaves. As the tree gets bigger, it is less sensitive to freezes. Some trees, like limes, are very sensitive to freezes and should be kept in pots and brought in if there is going to be a freeze.

**Harvesting:** Citrus ripen depending on the variety. Some like limes may produce several times during the year. Some satsumas produce as early as August and others as late as December. Oranges can ripen as early as November and some in January. Except for satsumas and some limes, all citrus will change color before they are ripe. You can taste when you think they are ripe and keep tasting on a weekly basis. You will soon learn what they taste like when ripe.

**Varieties for the Houston Area Climate**

**Improved Meyer Lemon** The Meyer lemon tree is considered the world's gourmet lemon. The fruit is sourest in August, and sweetest in January. Although it bears heavily November through April, the tree is everbearing - flowers and fruit are present on the tree at the same time. Meyer grows to about 10' tall and 8'-10' wide and produces heavy crops year after year. Allowed to ripen on the tree, the rind turns golden. Meyer tolerates temperatures down to 29ºF. If Meyer freezes to the ground in hard freeze it will grow and produce again in 18 months. The tree is believed a hybrid between *Citrus limon*, the lemon, and *Citrus reticulata*, the mandarin orange.

**Eureka Pink Lemon** The leaves are variegated green and white and the rind is striped green and cream making the tree quite ornamental. When fully ripe, the stripes fade, and the rind turns yellow. The flesh is light pink at full maturity, has very few seeds, and nicely acidic. Everything you would want in the landscape and the kitchen!

**Ponderosa** Ponderosa is a conversation piece for the fruit collector. Thought to be a cross between lemon and citron, the fruit is large and seedy with a thick, bumpy skin. The tree is slow growing and a bit thorny, but it often bears fruits and flowers at the same time. Flowers are a bit large than the typical citrus flower. The juice is nicely acidic, and one fruit can provide sufficient juice for several lemon pies.

**Ujukitsu** Sweet, very tasty mild orange-lemon flavors. A unique tasting fruit that you will never forget. A cross between a lemon and an orange, it is sometimes called a sweet lemon. It looks a bit like one, but the taste is not lemony. It is more like an “orange with a bright twist”. It is also called the “Lemonade Fruit”. Quite cold hardy. It has a slightly weeping habit, but can be pruned into a nice canopy.

**Multi-grafted Lemons** New to the industry, these multi-grafted varieties offer the benefit of two different lemons on one rootstock. Perfect for small or crowded gardens and for containers. See variety labels.

**Mexican Lime/Key Lime** The Key Lime also referred to as a Mexican Lime, bears a profuse amount of small, thin-skinned, greenish-yellow limes. This juicy lime is known for its distinctive aroma high-acid content. Flowers and fruits almost continuously. High light requirements, good air circulation, good drainage required. Thorny, compact bush with small, blunt-pointed leaves. Winter protection is required. Not cold tolerant; keep in container and move inside during freezes.
**Persian (Tahiti or Bearss) Lime** This lime is larger, more cold tolerant and has less pungent rind oil aroma than the Mexican lime. This seedless variety is the most commonly cultivated lime for commercial purposes – the market lime. Originally thought to be a cross between a Key Lime and either a lemon or a citron. The tree is nearly thornless. Usually sold green, it will actually turn yellow when fully ripe. Long storage on the tree and good shelf life after harvest. Slightly less acidic than the Key Lime and has nicely aromatic zest.

**Kaffir/Makrut Lime** A small evergreen tree with hourglass-shaped leaves and small green fruit that are used extensively in Thai cooking. Native to tropical Indonesia, the Kaffir/Makrut is grown chiefly for the fragrant leaves, which are used in Southeast Asian cuisine. The small, bumpy fruit is also used, mostly for the zest.

**Philippine Lime Calamondin** Small upright kumquat-size fruit, outstanding sour juice. Very decorative plant. Great for fish, lemonade, and flavoring drinks. Cold hardy into the teens. Produces a quarter-sized juicy fruit that has a tender pulp that is acidic. The fruit can be eaten fresh or is wonderful when used in marmalades. This tree is very showy when grown in a container and used as a patio specimen.

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