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Thursday, May 1, 2025



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How to Grow Lemon Trees: The Complete Guide



Photo Credit: Grazziela

Botanical Name:	Citrus limon
Plant Type:	Fruit
Season:	Full Sun

FREE GUIDE!



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Learn how to plant, grow, and care for lemon trees

By [Andy Wilcox](#)

Last Updated: January 9, 2025



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TRY NOW

When life doesn't give you enough lemons, try growing your own! The fragrant flowers and bright yellow fruits of the lemon tree are undeniably attractive. And, yes, in cold zones you can grow them in pots, which can be moved indoors. Learn how to plant, grow, and harvest lemon trees, whether outdoors in the ground or indoors in a container.

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About Lemon Trees

Growing citrus trees, especially lemon trees, is a popular endeavor, but remember that citrus trees can not withstand climates that experience frost. A hard freeze may kill the aboveground growth.

So, if you live in an area unsuitable for growing lemons in the ground, treat them like houseplants. Let them enjoy the sunshine and fresh air all spring and summer, and then bring them inside for the winter.

An attractive container is a fantastic addition to your deck or patio. Deep green, glossy foliage and lovely, scented white blooms in spring and, of course, bright yellow lemons hanging like ornaments on a holiday tree in summer make a display worth talking about. And with some luck, you get to harvest lemons!

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[Learn more about “good” fruit and “bad” fruit to trying growing at home.](#)

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- [How to Grow Citronella Plants](#)
- [How To Grow a Banana Plant in a Container](#)
- [How to Grow Lemon Balm: The Complete Guide](#)

PLANTING

Lemon trees need sun and warmth for flavorful fruit. They must have at least 6 hours of sunshine per day. Outside in the ground, it's best to plan near a location that reflects warmth such as a driveway, patio, or wall. Avoid planting in lawn grass.

They need a location or container with good drainage and prefer slightly acidic soil. Avoid heavy, nearly pure clay soils. Most lemon tree varieties are not tolerant of frost, and high winds are problematic and cause breakage.

Buying a

For their first lemon tree, gardeners will be more likely to succeed by purchasing a sapling from a well-known and reputable supplier. These small trees will come in containers. Look for healthy leaves and roots.

Choose rootstock to control the mature size and impart cold hardiness.

If planting in the ground, consider the mature size of your lemon tree, and avoid areas like sewer lines or places too near a parking area where lemons could fall on your car. Large, full-size trees will need at least a 12-by-12 foot space. Semi-dwarf trees will need an 8-by-8 foot space.

The only true dwarfing rootstock (good for containers) is 'Flying Dragon', which will yield a 4 to 8 foot tree. [Learn more about growing citrus in containers.](#)



Young lemon trees in containers.
Credit: Shutterstock

Can you grow lemon trees from seed?

If you're feeling a bit like a gambler, you can absolutely grow a lemon tree from the seeds in a grocery store lemon. The seeds will germinate, and with proper care, a new tree will grow. The gambling part comes from the seeds. Many lemons are hybrids bred for disease resistance, fruit quality, and other traits.

Seeds from hybrid plants (and trees) won't

will revert to those of the parent, and it's impossible to predict in advance. Your new lemon tree may not be disease resistant, make bitter little lemons with little meat inside, or have poor hardiness. But it's a nearly free project and can be quite entertaining.

When To Plant Lemon Trees

Springtime planting works well for in-ground lemon trees. Wait for the [last spring frosts](#) to pass and the nighttime temperatures to warm. Lemon trees headed for a container life can be planted whenever you bring them home. Of course, you can start a lemon from seed at any time.

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How To Plant Lemon Trees in the Ground

Lemon trees can be planted the same way as other fruit trees and ornamentals. Pay attention to their mature size; they'll grow larger in the ground than in a pot. Space them appropriately from the edge of buildings, sidewalks, and powerlines. Remember, whether planting in the ground or in a container, your lemon tree likely needs to be hardened off, especially if it was growing in a greenhouse.

- Dig a hole at least twice as wide as the root ball and about as deep. The hole should have sloped sides like a shallow bowl.
- Loosen the soil in the bottom of the hole to help with drainage.
- Remove the lemon tree from its con-

lay the container on its side and gently roll it back and forth, applying enough pressure to bend the plastic container.

- Prune all circling or girdling roots.
Loosen up rootbound lemon trees by scoring the edges of the root ball with your soil knife or trowel.
- Test fit the tree in the hole, ensuring it will sit at the same level in the new spot. Adjust the depth as necessary by adding soil or digging a bit deeper.
- Plant the tree, backfilling the hole with the soil you removed. Don't forget to keep it upright! It's easy to plant a crooked tree when focusing on the roots, not the trunk. Firm the soil around the roots to avoid air pockets.
- Form a slightly raised berm like a donut around the plant to keep water from draining away.
- Water your lemon trees thoroughly, letting water soak into the soil.
- Mulch underneath to keep weeds down and keep the soil moist. Extend the mulch two feet from the stems and apply it 3-4 inches thick. But don't al-

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How to Plant a Lemon Tree in a Pot

You'll need a pot with excellent drainage and some potting soil to grow lemon trees in containers. Use half-barrel size or at least 15-gallon containers for most varieties. Premixed products made specifically for citrus trees are the easiest way to go, but regular potting soil can be used, amended with extra perlite or sand to aid drainage.

- Remove your lemon tree from its pot and prune any circling roots. Loosen up the bottom and sides of the rootball.
- Select a pot several inches larger than the current container. While it may be tempting to plant a small young tree in its forever pot, it's best to move upward in stages.
- Ensure the drainage holes are large and adequate. New pots often need to have them poked or drilled open.

- When the depth is correct, fill the remaining area around the root ball with potting mix, firming it to avoid air pockets.
- Water your newly transplanted lemon tree thoroughly until water comes out of the drainage holes.

GROWING

Lemon trees are fairly adaptable and will survive quite well in many less than ideal locations—as long as it doesn't freeze.

Fertilize lemon trees monthly during the growing season with a general purpose or a citrus tree fertilizer. Regular fertilizer is especially important for containerized lemon trees, which depend on you to supply all of their nutrient needs.

Pruning lemon trees is helpful to maintain their size and correct any problem patterns. Remove crossing branches and prune to keep airflow moving throughout the crown.

plants together and use a small humidifier to keep them happy.

While lemon trees will slow down their growth in winter, they're evergreens and will still need light if you bring them indoors. While a sunny window may provide some light, they generally need supplemental grow lighting to thrive in winter.

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Types

- The improved Meyer lemon is possibly the most popular lemon tree for home growers. Its prolific nature and willingness to fruit when grown in a con-

are a bit sweeter and juicier than typical store lemons.

- ‘Eureka’ is one of the big lemons you see at the grocery store. Even though these trees produce large fruits, dwarf varieties are available which can be grown in containers and kept to a modest size.
- For container lemon trees, choose trees on fully dwarfing rootstock (‘Flying Dragon’) or naturally smaller trees such as Meyer lemon.

HARVESTING

Citrus fruit won’t continue to ripen after picking like apples. The best way to test whether your lemons are ready for harvest is to taste test one. Once they look ripe, use a snips to cut the stem above the fruit. After a few lemons, you’ll get a feel for what ripe looks and feels like on your particular lemon tree.

Harvesting fresh tasty lemons from
potted citrus plant. Credit: Ivan
Semenovych

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

If you want fruits, be aware that insects only pollinate lemon trees outside. If you're growing indoors, you may mainly need to enjoy the fragrant flowers and the pretty green leaves, and count yourself lucky if you also have lemons!

Other pests are fairly common, especially

wash the leaves. Check the undersides
of leaves

- Whiteflies
- Aphids
- Scale
- Spider mites
- Thrips

WIT AND WISDOM

- If you need to move your lemon tree indoors for the cold months, consider what size pot you'll be able to move and how you'll move it. You may need a pot with rollers or a small dolly to help. It's always easier with two people.
- Once your lemon tree flowers, you'll likely need to help them out with some hand pollinating, especially if they are indoors. Lemons are self-fertile, so you won't need another variety to get fruit.
- Insect problems can be brought in from the outdoors when plants are brought inside in the fall. Do a thorough check before moving your lemon

indoors in fall is important. If it is in a sunny location, move it to the shade for a couple of weeks in preparation for the lower light levels it will experience in the house. A little leaf and fruit drop is a common occurrence.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Wilcox



Andy Wilcox is a flower farmer and master gardener with a passion for soil health, small producers, forestry, and horticulture.

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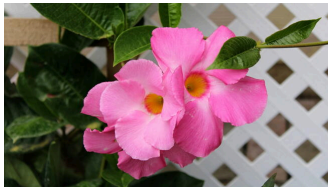
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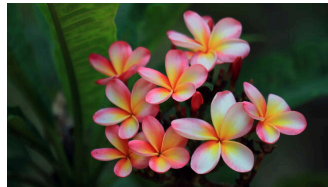
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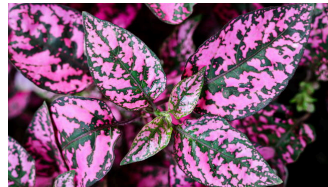
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Gregor (not verified) 2 months 1 week ago

When starting from seed, don't let them dry first. Just rinse them as they come out of the fruit and plant. Also, surprised that there was no mention of the thorns. A big consideration if small children are around and certainly something that the gardener needs to deal with if transplanting or pruning.

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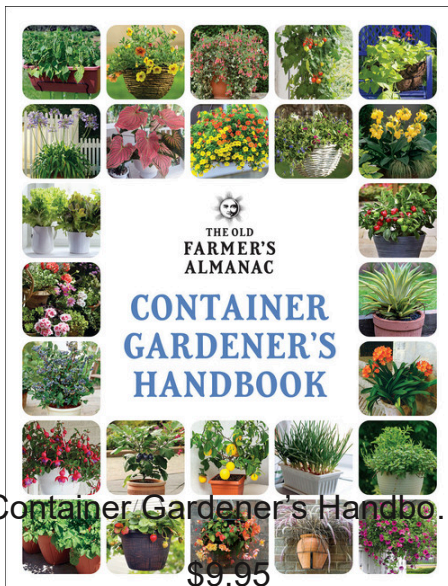
[REPLY](#)

6 months ago

Thank you for the article on Lemon trees. We purchased one last year and have had it indoors the entire time. Now I know more on caring for our tree. It is hardy because it is still alive. We live in zone 8 and now I know what I need to do with the lemon tree. Early next spring it will go outside. Thanks again, great article.

REPLY

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