

Basic Citrus and Avocado tree Care

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Newly Planted Trees

For the first few years encourage the roots to spread by removing any flowers or fruit, apply mulch but do not fertilise unless you see a problem with the leaves and make sure that irrigation is even all around the base of the tree, preferably on the limit of the hole that was dug. Do not prune until established (approximately 2-3 years), then carry out its first annual prune and start to shape the crown maintaining as much foliage as possible. If the tree is sited in a windy situation it may be necessary to support it with a stake however every 6 months move the tie to prevent injury. After two years it should be possible to completely remove the support.

Correct Pruning Practices

Use good quality, sharp secateurs, loppers and saws as clean cuts heal better and quickly. Take a step back and focus on the overall look of your trees. Ideally you want neat shapes with plenty of healthy foliage.

Before pruning, take a close look at each tree to identify any problems such as insect pests, fungus, nutrient deficiency or irrigation issues. If necessary disinfect your tools before commencement of working on the next tree to reduce the spread of disease. It is not advisable to use wound heal products as bacteria or fungus can be trapped into the scar.

Annual pruning should involve removing dead, unhealthy, crossing, rubbing and poorly positioned branches but minimise the loss of healthy foliage. The best time to prune is soon after harvest, in winter to early spring, before bud break. For late varieties where two crops may hang on the tree at once some of the new crop may be lost.

While many citrus trees grow thorns at some point during their life cycle, pruning the thorns away will not damage the tree and will make harvesting the fruit easier.



Correct Pruning Practices cont...



Approximately every 3 years, as well as the annual prune, reduce the size of the crown by cutting back the branches by 20% and aim to prune the tree into a ball or wineglass shape. The idea is to have the fruit always within reach without the use of ladders. Remove leggy branches that are poking out from the canopy in an unsightly or obvious way. Target branches that block your walking path around the tree. When branches touch the soil or ground, they can become a superhighway for pests. They also stop air from moving around the trunk and that can cause disease. Trim back low branches until they are at least 60cm off the ground. Remove any suckers that may grow from below the crown and its grafting point.

If the tree is getting too big or too high it is unwise to reduce the size of the crown by pollarding as this will create sunburn on the unprotected, unshaded trunk and branches (see below). Pollarding also reduces the productivity of the tree for a few years and some trees may succumb to too hard a prune.

Any diseased prunings should be immediately burnt or disposed of off-site.

Sunburn

When a tree becomes sunburned, it often forms cracks in the bark and within these cracks,



damaging insects or fungus can find a nice home. Should the bark have split, cut the ragged edges back to the cambium layer with a Stanley knife to promote a healthier, cleaner healing. Do not paint injuries with pruning sealers. If necessary, build an awning or fix a sun-umbrella over damaged trees or a more simple method to protect exposed trunks and

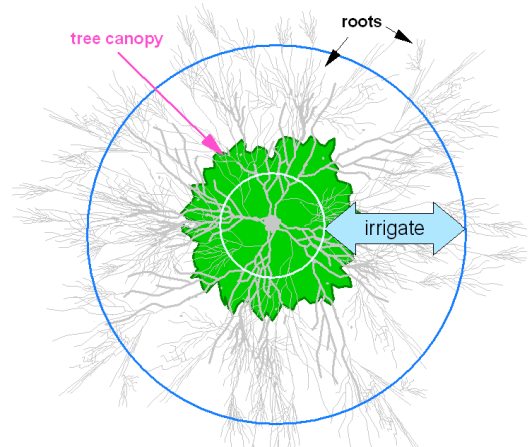
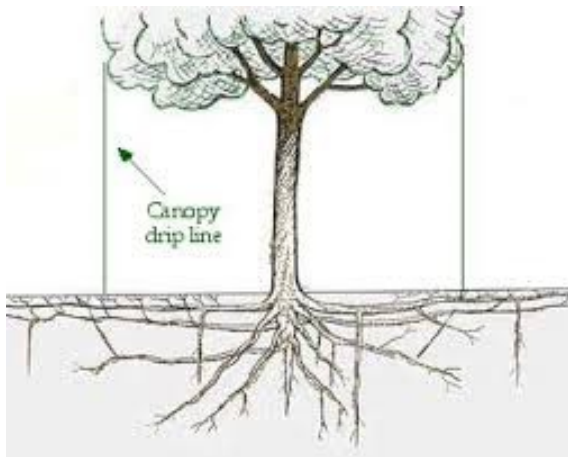


branches is by using citrus paint or simply mixing white latex paint with water so that the resulting mixture is 1/2 paint and 1/2 water. You can also purchase tree wraps made from burlap, which can also help to protect them. *Do not use oil-based paint.*

If the branches of your trees are allowed to grow and the trunks are shaded, then there is no need to paint them.

Irrigating Citrus and Avocados

Every Tree owner should know the importance of where the Canopy Drip Line (CDL) of a plant is with regard to the 3 main tasks of maintenance: watering, fertilizing and mulching. The approximate root zone where water should be sprinkled, fertilizer applied and mulch laid is determined by the drip line of the widest part of the tree canopy. The CDL is defined as the point on the ground where water will drip off the widest-reaching branch. This area is not only of importance for watering and feeding Citrus and Avocado trees, but is relative to all trees, shrubs, bushes and hedges.



Estimating water use will depend on the trees age, size, soil type, climate and species. Watering correctly allows trees to preserve a natural resistance to pests, fungus and diseases and is critical to the development of good quality fruit. Overwatering predisposes the tree to root and crown rots while underwatering will produce small dry fruit and limit the capability for the foliage to photosynthesise.

Ideally during the heat of Summer, saturate the soil giving the tree a deep watering in the evening every 4 to 8 days. Check the soil beforehand as it should be almost dry before watering again. Trees can be irrigated using a drip system with four to eight emitters or more sited around each tree, hand watering with a hose, gravity watering having dug a small trench round the CDL or using small micro-spray emitters.

Research has found that, in the heat of Summer, a mature tree may require from 100—500 litres per watering, depending upon the climate zone and soil characteristics. This can correspond to as much as 65 litres of water per irrigation during dry spells in the Winter.

As trees grow, move the irrigation to apply water on the CDL further from the tree trunk .

Established “dry” fruit trees that grow in the Algarve such as Olives, Almonds, Figs and Carobs do not require irrigation in the Summer time due to their drought tolerance. They are also quite hardy and rarely require fertilisation. It is best to keep these fruit trees away from lawns and trees that require year-round irrigation.

Fertilisers for Citrus, Avocado and Fruiting trees

Fertilising Citrus and Avocado trees should occur three times a year – once in Spring, once in Summer and again in the Autumn. When the tree becomes dormant in Winter, cease feeding. Use a slow release soil fertiliser so that losses to the deeper strata of the soil are avoided and it is available to trees during sprouting and the reproductive phase. Avocado trees do well on Citrus fertilisers.

Citrus trees are demanding feeders and are prone to many disorders related to mineral nutrition. Citrus can suffer from deficiencies of at least eight of the thirteen essential elements which plants obtain from the soil. Common deficiencies are:

Major Elements: nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), potassium (K) and magnesium (Mg)

Minor/Trace Elements: zinc (Zn), manganese (Mn), iron (Fe) and copper (Cu)

The leaves of fruit trees with an iron or manganese deficiency are shown as having green veins and yellow margins.



Agrofer:

This is a liquid foliage fertiliser for application on the leaves of fruit trees. It is high in Iron.



Exacton - Citrinos:

This is a slow release soil fertiliser specific to Citrus trees. It contains trace elements of Iron and Manganese that is important for the health of all Citrus. It should be applied beneath the edge of the canopy on the CDL away from the trunk.

