



Growing lemon trees indoors provides personal market

Growing lemon trees indoors at home is a little bit like having a fresh market right inside your house. How many times have you been preparing a recipe that calls for fresh-squeezed lemon juice, only to discover you're out of lemons?

Growing citrus isn't reserved just for those who live in sunny locales such as California or Florida. An added bonus is you don't need a big yard – or any yard for that matter – because they can be grown indoors if you have a brightly lit area. Growing a lemon tree indoors is a great option for those who may live in apartments or condos with little to no yard space.

Cultivars such as 'Improved Meyer' and 'Ponderosa' lemons are suitable for containers; these trees don't grow very large, so they're perfect for an indoor space. They are also most likely to produce fruit indoors in winter. Other citrus will grow and flower but are less likely to produce fruit.

Don't make plans to open a fruit stand at the local farmers market with all of your excess lemons, but you can get a few for personal use. Because citrus trees are self-fertile, multiple trees are not required for pollination. However, if kept inside year-round, shaking the tree gently when flowers are open will facilitate pollination.

Under favorable climatic conditions, citrus blooms and matures fruit nearly on a continual basis. There are two main periods of bloom – spring and fall – that correspond with peak production of winter and summer. The amount of fruit you'll get varies on the climatic conditions and the variety you're growing.

Just like growing plants outdoors, soil drainage is a concern for growing lemon trees. Citrus is sensitive to excess moisture and root diseases, so make sure the soil or potting mix drains well. Also, avoid potting mixes that contain alkali salts and borax. Two important factors are watering and fertilizer. Maintain adequate soil moisture at all times. Irrigate when the soil feels dry to the touch. The amount of moisture needed will be determined by the light and humidity in the home and time of year, along with plant size. More water and fertilizer will be needed during the summer due to increased sun exposure, day length and heat.

Fertilizer is necessary to maintain satisfactory growth with nitrogen being the most beneficial element. Citrus plants need an ample supply of nitrogen and organic matter when grown in pots. You can add diluted liquid fertilizer once every four to six weeks when watering. Another option is granulated, slow-release fertilizer. Be sure to follow the directions on the label for rate of application.

Indoor lemon trees need pruning just like trees in your landscape. When grown indoors, it's important to keep them compact and this can be done by shortening to the lateral branches and thinning in the spring. Monitor your containerized citrus for insect pests too. Treat as necessary with a least toxic insecticide appropriate for the pest(s) you find.

When it's time to harvest, pick the fruit while it's still immature and green. Keep it at room temperature until it turns yellow. The fruit may then be stored in polyethylene bags in the refrigerator for several days to a week.