

## Phil's Garden Tips for Citrus

### Citrus:

1<sup>st</sup> feeding of the year is around St. Patrick's Day. Only fertilize if tree has not flowered. If you fertilize a flowering tree or a tree that is setting fruit, the flowers or fruit will probably drop off. Wait until Memorial Day (May) to fertilize tree (2<sup>nd</sup> fertilizing of the year). Fruit should be large enough by then to withstand fertilization. 3<sup>rd</sup> fertilization of the year is done around Labor Day (September).

Citrus trees need about 1 pound of Nitrogen per year. This is for trees 5 years old or older. If you are using Ammonium Sulphate (21% Nitrogen), you need about 5 pounds of Ammonium Sulphate for the whole year. This is about 1 pound 10 ounces each time you fertilize. If you are using a fertilizer that is 10% Nitrogen, you will need 10 pounds of fertilizer for the year or about 3 pounds 5 ounces each time you fertilize. Ammonium Sulphate is a good choice. It's cheap, it's water soluble, and it's what most commercial citrus growers use. It is also concentrated-DO NOT OVERDOSE! Water the area under the dripline of the tree and about one foot out (citrus roots extent about one foot out from the dripline). Broadcast the Ammonium Sulphate, and then water again. The Sulphur in the Ammonium Sulphate will also help lower the ph. This should be repeated about Memorial Day and Labor Day. Citrus need a moderate amount of water. Citrus roots only go about 3 feet deep. The mechanism that sets up flowering takes place in the winter, thus watering is essential during winter. In dry, hot climates of the Southwest deserts, watering is very important during the summer also. Citrus needs to be planted in full sun, but not close to a wall that gives reflected heat. Citrus will sunburn on trunks. Do not prune lower limbs of citrus (except suckers that grow beneath the bud union). The lower branches help shield the trunk from sunburn. A good suggestion is to paint the lower trunk with a latex white paint that has been thinned by 50% with water. Also, water should not be left standing against trunk-the basin for watering should be shaped like a donut rather than like a bowl to keep standing water away from the trunk. In most cases, it is not necessary to prune citrus. An errant branch can be pruned, but most citrus has a defined shape. If you are looking for a certain shape (within reason), there is probably a variety for you. Citrus is grafted onto a root stock. The types used for root stock serve many purposes. Root stock can be hardier than the scion (grafted tree)-most are more resistant to disease and ailments. They are also used to control the size of the citrus tree. Sour orange root stock is commonly used for full size trees. A species of citrus called trifoliate orange or hardy orange is a rootstock that dwarfs the tree to about half of its normal size. A variety of trifoliate orange called "flying dragon" can dwarf a tree by 75% of its normal size.