

Tips on how to grow lemon trees

BY RACHEL VOGAN
Garden Writer



Nothing says summer to me more than a glass tinkling with ice with a dash of gin, a slice or two of lemon and tonic.

At the moment though, as I am in the diet paddock, I have swapped tonic for water and added lemon juice, and it's just as nice. It's a fact lemon is a refreshing flavour whether you prefer it in drinks, cheesecakes, marmalades, cakes, muffins, liqueurs . . . the list goes on. All parts except the pips of the fruit can be used, from the flavoursome rind to the tangy flesh and of course the juice.

Years ago, every home had a lemon tree, clump of rhubarb and a mint patch. These days with gardens getting smaller and smaller, lemons are not as common, but they should be. Typically they are easy to grow as long as you follow a few basics. Like me, they love food, sun and water.

To start with you will need to provide your lemon tree with all day sun. They can grow in the shade but it's not ideal as the fruit struggles to ripen and disease problems can occur. When planting your tree, plant it no deeper than it is already set in the bag that you buy it in.

Next it's all about the roots, they need a deeply worked soil to



anchor their long root system into. They prefer a slightly acidic soil, therefore try a little grit or pumice in the soil and fertilise with Tui citrus food each spring and late summer.

It's essential to keep lemons well-watered. Once established lemons can cope with dry periods if they need to, as the roots can seek out deep water in the soil. However, it's not ideal, as water is

a key source for fruit production.

If planting lemons in a container, make sure it is deep, and use a good container mix like Pot Power. The best time to plant lemon trees is spring after the frosts have finished.

Lemon trees are an attractive evergreen shrub which, if left, can reach three to five metres in height. Regular pruning during spring or summer can keep them



Citrus blast: Lemons prefer a slightly acidic soil, therefore try a little grit or pumice in the soil and fertilise with citrus food each spring and late summer.

Photos: RACHEL VOGAN

easily at one to 1.5m in height.

Prune to open up the centre of the plant to encourage good air circulation and ease of fruit harvest. As some lemons have sharp thorns, it pays to prune an open habit to limit being carved up by the nasty thorns.

Don't prune after March (unless you are in a frost-free area) as you will likely encourage new growth, which will be prone to frost damage in the winter.

What type to grow:

A number of varieties can be grown, take note though that the Meyer lemon is the hardiest variety and is most likely to grow

well in a cooler area.

Eureka – widely grown lemon variety a bitter flavour with high juice and acid content.

Lisbon – medium-thick rind, productive, trees are very thorny, particularly when young.

Meyer – the hardiest of all lemons, smooth, thin-skinned fruit, relatively sweet juice makes it a popular choice with many.

Lemonade – A sweeter tangy lemon, can be eaten raw and is perfect for making fresh lemonade.

Yen Ben – very few seeds. An adaptable variety that is tolerant to hot and cold.

Lotsa Lemons – a relatively new hybrid of the Meyer lemon, it is said to produce more fruit and be drought resistant.

Did you know that lemons are very high in potassium and ascorbic acid and even a regular slice of lemon in hot water is a good way to absorb these minerals? I knew I was doing something right!

I have just made my first batch of the Italian liqueur, limoncello, and it's absolutely divine. I had to wait three months to taste it, now that took self-control I can tell you, but boy was the wait worth it. My goodness I keep thinking of excuses to sample a bit more.

If you want the recipe email me and I will flick it through to you: rachelvogan@gmail.com

■ Rachel Vogan, The Daisy Chain & Plant Brokers, Christchurch, call 03 329 6323 or 021 632 342.

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