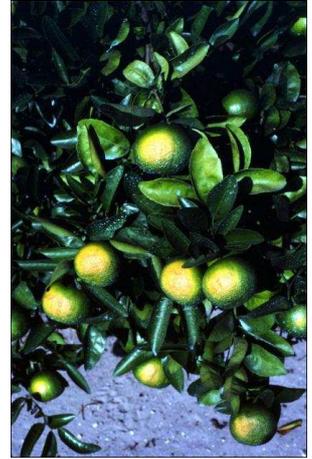


What's Wrong with my Citrus Tree?

By: Denise DeBusk, Environmental & Community Horticulture Agent
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For the past several weeks, this has been a very common question from homeowners at the UF/IFAS County Extension Office. It is often followed up with “Am I going to have to cut down my tree?” With the fear of citrus greening and the ill fate of the tree, this is a true concern, but there are many environmental factors, pests, and diseases that can affect the look of the tree and the size, taste, and appearance of the fruit.



Although some pests, such as insects, mites, and fungal diseases show symptoms on the leaves and fruit much earlier in the season, many homeowners don't really notice these symptoms until right before they pick the fruit. To the homeowner's dismay, there is little to be done at that point since all the control options which may include fertilization, pruning, and pesticide application should begin in the spring rather than late fall or winter.

The growth and yield of the tree can be affected by several cultural practices, such as planting, fertilization and watering. Citrus plants need to be planted at a proper depth in well-drained soil with full sun. They should be set at least 20-25 feet apart unless a vigorous pruning program is maintained. The area should be free of weeds and not mulched. The tree needs to be watered once a week when there is little or no rainfall. The tree should be fertilized one pound per year of tree (up to 8 pounds) three times a year beginning in January – February with citrus-type fertilizer.

Occasionally the rootstock can take over causing the fruit to be sour. This can happen if you have a very vigorous rootstock like rough lemon, Volkameriana, or Rangpur which will cause the tree to produce a blander, diluted tasting fruit. If you fail to remove suckers from below the graft on a citrus tree, the rootstock may take over and produce flowers and fruit of its own. Damage to the scion or upper part of the tree from freezing can also cause this problem.

Weather conditions can greatly affect the fruit quality. Too much rain can cause fruit to split. Too much sun can cause fruit to burn. If the night temperatures are not low enough, ripening or coloring may be delayed and the fruit not sweet enough. Before harvesting all the oranges, try one and if it is not sweet, leave it on the tree a bit longer. The cool temperatures reduce the acidity of the fruit.

With fungal diseases, the fungus often affects the looks of the tree and fruit, but often does not affect the taste, although it may affect the amount of fruit. Fungal diseases with symptoms such as spots and scabs can often be controlled with copper fungicides applied to the leaves starting shortly after the first flush in the spring and again when the leaves approach full expansion. The disease that causes root and foot rot is more difficult to control and is usually a planting or drainage issue. Citrus greening is a bacterial disease and currently has no control options. Visit https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_citrus_greening for more information on this disease.

If insects or mites are the issue, horticultural oils sprayed on the leaves once the insect is sighted can often help the situation. The pests that feed on citrus include aphids, citrus leafminers, citrus psyllids, and rust mites. These are all very small insects and often feed on the underside of the leaves or on the new growth. Citrus psyllids are particularly dangerous since they can transmit citrus greening.

To help identify what is wrong with your citrus, see photos of symptoms and specific recommendations, visit <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/hs141> for more information. Since citrus resist insect, disease, and environmental issues more effectively when properly maintained, visit <http://www.ultimatecitrus.com/pdf/dooryard.pdf> for more information on growing citrus.