Spring Citrus Care

Spring has sprung and it's time to think about caring for your citrus trees. Fruit trees need regular maintenance such as irrigation, fertilization, weed control and pest management procedures must be followed to ensure the best fruit production. Citrus is no exception.

Most fruit have passed their harvest time and the trees are ready to begin blooming again. In order to produce a plentiful crop in the fall, they are going to need some care.

First, clean up underneath the tree. Citrus does not like to be mulched. Clean any grass, weeds, or other plants under the dripline. These plants will compete with the citrus tree for water and nutrients. They also increase the humidity around the trunk of the tree, which can increase the chance of disease.

Next, remove all dead, broken and diseased branches. Citrus require little pruning. They are not like other trees. Pruning is done to shape the trees or remove water sprouts or suckers. Be certain to make pruning cuts correctly. Do not leave stubs as they may be attacked by rot organisms which could damage the tree. You do not need to paint the stubs; a proper cut will heal just fine.

Fertilizer is an important factor. It helps in the proper growth and development of young trees and the development of large crops and good quality fruit of mature trees.

During the first few years after a citrus has been planted, apply frequent, light applications of a special citrus fertilizer approximately every six weeks beginning in the March, April time frame. Avoid fertilization during the summer rainy season because of potential leaching of the fertilizer. Do not fertilize between October and February to prevent winter growth flushes.

Apply fertilizer uniformly in a three foot diameter circle around the tree. As the tree becomes older, the area fertilized should be enlarged as the root system expands.
Never apply fertilizer in piles or mound fertilizer against the trunk. Fertilizer spikes are not recommended. They only supply fertilizer to a small percentage of the total root system.

Mature trees may be fertilized a maximum of three times per year, spring, early summer and again in late summer. But your tree may produce more fruit when fertilized only once or twice per year. Base this on experience, soil type and tree response. Be sure not to apply fertilizers such as weed and feed around the trees. This could possibly damage the tree.

The UF/IFAS- Bay County Extension in cooperation with Jackson County Extension will conduct a class on Growing Citrus in North Florida. Dr. Steve Futch, Multi-County Citrus Agent will conduct the class. The class will be on April 24th at the Jackson County Extension office in Marianna, Florida. Registration will be from 8:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. The class will be from 9 a.m. to 12 noon with a lunch following the program. After lunch there will be a tour of a local Satsuma orchard. The cost is $10. To register, call the Bay County Extension office at 850-784 6105 or the Jackson County office at 850- 342 0187.

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