



Citrus – Sweet Lime

Citrus limettioides Tan.

Rutaceae

Species description

Sweet lime trees are medium sized and moderately vigorous, with nearly thornless, widespread, drooping branches. The leaves are broad-lanceolate and serrated, with nearly wingless petioles. The flowers are borne singly on the leaf axils or in terminal clusters of two to ten; the fruits may be solitary or in small bunches. Sweet limes grow 15-20 feet tall and live for 50+ years. Citrus are hardy to 23°F-26°F, though this may depend on cultivar. The fruit is obovate, somewhat flattened, with the apex rounded into a prominent nipple. The peel is bright green and at maturity will begin to turn yellow. The flesh is acidless, dry, and pungent.



Natural and cultural history

Little is known about the origin of sweet lime, though it may be a hybrid of a Mexican lime and a sweet lemon or citron. The primary areas of cultivation include central and northern India, northern Vietnam, countries of the Mediterranean coast, and the tropical Americas.

Planting considerations and propagation techniques

Sweet lime trees prefer full sun, good air circulation around the tree, and a spacing of 25 feet apart for maximum production. Citrus trees in general are spiny so care should be taken in placement, especially in public spaces. Citrus flowers are self-fertile and require no cross-pollination, though honeybees are effective pollinators. Sweet lime trees have been shown to produce higher yields if they are interplanted and cross-pollinated with sweet orange or grapefruit trees. In general, citrus trees can grow on a wide range of soil types from sand to loam to heavy clay as long as they are well drained. Citrus trees do best with a soil pH of 6-6.5, though different rootstocks prefer different soil types. Lime trees may be propagated by seed, and the resulting trees will be true to the parent. Root sprouts from mature trees may also be cut and planted. In India and the Americas, sweet lime trees are often grown from cuttings.

Water needs

Citrus need about 4-6 inches of water per month in the summer; they are generally not drought tolerant and need careful attention to produce well-developed fruit.

Care

Citrus trees should be trained to a suitable shape with an open center. There are three primary pruning objectives: increase total leaf area, improve airflow through the canopy, and increase light to the branches. Proper training keeps trees the correct size for ease of care and harvest.

Citrus are prone to many diseases and pests. We recommend consulting a Cooperative Extension citrus specialist.

(See Yuma Cooperative Extension, <https://extension.arizona.edu/yuma>; and <http://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/pubs/az1492.pdf>).

Harvesting and processing

Sweet limes may be eaten when they are still green, though they will become more yellow as they mature. Sweet limes are a delightful, pungent, low-acid citrus to eat fresh, and they may also be made into marmalade and preserves.

References and resources

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