Spring citrus care

As you clean up your landscape this spring, don't forget about your citrus trees. As with most fruit trees, regular maintenance such as irrigation, fertilization, weed control and pest management procedures must be followed for best growth and production of fruit.

Most fruit, with a few exceptions, are past 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. The area under the canopy of the tree should be bare ground. There should not be any grass, weeds, or other plants in this area. 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. Mulches should also be avoided for the same reason. However, if they must be used, keep all mulch at least 12 to 24 inches from the tree trunk.

Next, remove all dead, broken and diseases branches. Actual pruning is seldom necessary except 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.

Fertilizer is an important factor in home citrus care. 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 March. 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. Also avoid the use of fertilizer spikes—these 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.
When the citrus trees have a flush of new growth this spring, you will probably see citrus leafminer damage. Citrus leafminers are common but do not kill the tree. Leafminer larvae are flat allowing them to tunnel and feed within leaves, mainly affecting young leaves. Symptoms of infestation include curling of leaves and serpentine tunnels within the leaves. The tunnels appear tan to brown with a silvery film over them. Homeowner control options are very limited. You can spray with horticultural oil when young foliage is present which will limit the adults laying eggs on the foliage or make the leaf surface slick making it harder for the eggs to stick. Look for one of the year-round or summer horticultural oils. Sprays to control the adults are usually not successful. For more information on citrus leafminer visit the UF/IFAS online publication at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/CH083](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/CH083) or call your local Extension Office.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others.

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