

## Citrus Canker and Citrus Greening in the Florida Keys

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When citrus trees are available for sale in the Florida Keys, remember the old adage “**buyer beware.**” Know what you are purchasing before taking the tree home to plant in your yard.

- 1) Make sure the citrus tree you are purchasing has a yellow Department of Plant Industry tag. The Department of Plant industry does a monthly visit of the citrus nurseries to check for Citrus Canker and tag all citrus trees that are for sale.
- 2) Ask what rootstock your citrus tree grafted on to. If the person selling you the citrus tree doesn't know or no tag is present, then you may be purchasing a grafted tree with a rootstock that does not grow well in the Florida Keys alkaline soils. Rootstocks recommended for alkaline soils are *Citrus macrophylla*, Rough Lemon, Rangpur Lime, Volkamer Lemon, and Sour Orange. Rootstocks not recommended for alkaline soils are Trifoliate Orange, Citrumelo, Grapefruit, Sweet Orange, and Citranges.
- 3) If you had storm surge on your property, have your soil checked to determine the salt content before planting. Obtain a soil sample in a flower pot, water the soil with tap water, and collect the water coming out of the drain holes in a jar. Bring it to the Monroe County Extension for an Electrical Conductivity test.
- 4) When planting your citrus tree, chose a site that is in full sun. Also, consider the proximity of the tree to salt winds and salt water, to buildings or other plants. If you want to plant two or more trees, they should be at least 20 to 25 feet apart. If you have a septic tank, avoid planting the citrus trees on the drain field. Not only can roots clog the drains, but also detergents and other chemicals may damage the tree.
- 5) Prepare the planting site by removing all grass and weeds in an area 4 - 6 feet in diameter. Loosen the native soil in the planting area by using a pick axe, auger, jack hammer, or shovel. Remove the tree from the container and if it appears pot-bound, make several vertical cuts in the root ball to stimulate new root growth. Dig a planting hole so that the tree will set in the ground slightly higher ( $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 inch) than it grew in the container. Re-fill the hole about  $\frac{1}{2}$  full, with the native soil or a mixture of 60% native mixed with either 40% moist peat moss or a potting soil, then water and tamp the soil to remove air pockets. Finish filling the hole

and pack the soil firmly around the root ball. Do not put mulch near the citrus tree because of the potential root rot.

- 6) Watering your newly planted citrus tree on a regular basis is critical for it to survive and thrive. Water the citrus tree 3 times a week for 2 weeks to get the tree established. Young citrus trees should be watered deeply every 7 - 10 days after establishment during periods of little or no rainfall. Young trees should never be allowed to wilt from lack of water. However, too much water can also harm the tree, especially on poorly drained soils.
- 7) Fertilization is essential for proper growth and development of young citrus trees. Fertilizer recommendations are different during the first five years of growth than for mature fruit bearing trees. Initially the young citrus tree will need a slow-release citrus fertilizer that is formulated for use on alkaline soils. As the citrus tree grows, regular applications of foliar micronutrient spray and chelated iron may be needed.

It is exciting to have citrus available for replanting in our landscapes, but keep informed about Citrus Greening Disease. Learn about the Citrus Greening symptoms at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PP133>. This disease appears to be more deadly to citrus than Citrus Canker.