

Kumquats and other citrus

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Citrus plants are generally easy to raise and grow, with scented flowers and edible fruit.

A kumquat is a type of citrus fruit, just like oranges and lemons. They are fun to grow because they are small, produce fruit when they are still young and are ideal for the windowsill or conservatory. Kumquats look great too. They have shiny green leaves and sweetly scented flowers, and the tiny orange-like fruits they produce can be eaten with their skins on. Normally, you can buy kumquats all year round, but they're easier to find in the autumn and winter.

If you can't find a kumquat, try growing a lemon tree. They're also quite easy to grow and have similar leaves and flowers.

How to grow a citrus plant

To get the seed, either eat the kumquat and spit out the pips, or cut the fruit open and remove the pips with a spoon. All citrus trees grow quite easily from seed, so you won't need to sow too many.

They like to be grown in a sandy compost, so you will need to make up your own special mixture. Fill a pot with multi-purpose compost and empty it into a mixing bowl. Fill the same pot to about a quarter full with sharp sand from a DIY store or garden centre and empty it into the mixing bowl. Mix the compost and the sharp sand together

thoroughly. This mixture is the compost you will sow your pips into.

You will need a pot measuring about 10cm across, with holes in the bottom to let water drain out. Fill your pot with the compost mixture and water it very well. Spread the seeds you have collected evenly over the surface of the compost, and cover them with about 1cm of the special compost mixture.

Water the pot a little more, put it in a clear plastic bag and tie the ends up. This is to keep all the moisture in and stop the pips from drying out. Put the pot in a warm place, like an airing cupboard.

The seeds will not take long to grow, so you must check them every day. If the compost looks dry at any time, give it a little water. As soon as you see any signs of growth, remove the plastic bag and put the pot on a sunny windowsill.

Kumquats grow quickly. Once each seedling has produced three or four leaves, it will need its own pot. Use pots about 8-10cm across, using the same special mixture you used to sow the seed.

Caring for your citrus plant

Kumquats and lemons are easy to look after, and will quickly produce attractive plants. They need lots of light, but be careful they don't get too hot. Because they grow fast, you will need to repot them quite often. To keep them healthy and help them to produce flowers and fruit, you should feed them every two weeks with a general plant food, right through the summer. Given time and some luck, you should get your own delicious crop of fruit!

