



Urban Harvest
Gardening for good.

Grapefruit and Pummelos

Category:	Semi-evergreen
Hardiness:	Damage expected below 22° F
Fruit Family:	Citrus
Light:	Full sun to half day sun
Size:	25'-35'H x 25'W average; varies by rootstock; may be pruned to desired HxW
Soil:	Well-drained
Planting:	Plant after danger of frost has passed, mid to late March



Grapefruits and pummelos are large trees. Since they are normally evergreen, they make a beautiful statement in the home garden. Grapefruits attain their sweetest flavors in places where the summers are hotter than Houston, but those we grow here are still better than those in the supermarket. They usually have a more acid taste than oranges and tangerines, but some of the best varieties for our area are very sweet. Pummelos are one of the large-fruited ancestors of grapefruits and oranges. They are much, much sweeter than grapefruit; better textured, and ripen much earlier, from September to December. Like shrimp or maybe chocolate bars, they take some work to eat. Their thick bird-proof skin needs to be peeled with a knife, sectioned like a tangerine, and then the tough membrane should be removed to reveal a truly wonderful taste treat.

Care of Grapefruit and Pummelo Trees

Planting: Newly purchased citrus have probably not been hardened off to tolerate our winter weather. Keep your citrus in the container until late March, or until all danger of freeze has passed. Trees can be kept outside in a sunny area on mild days and nights, but move them into the shelter of the garage or house if frost is predicted. You may take them back out after the frost. Water every few days while in pots unless it rains. Test the soil in the pot by pushing your finger into the soil. If it is dry an inch down, it is time to water.

Citrus does not require full sun; however, the more sun the more production of fruit. Plant them in an area that receives at least ½ day of full sun. If you are more than 75 miles from the Gulf, plant them on the south side of a house or building or where they will get a lot of protection from winter winds. Plant them in existing soil without amendments, and make sure the graft scar at the base of the trunk is a couple of inches above the soil line. Water deeply after planting and apply an inch of compost and several inches of rotting leaves, keeping the mulch at least 12" away from the trunk of the tree. Water daily for a few days after planting, then weekly for the first summer if it does not rain.

Pruning: Citrus does not require pruning for production. Light pruning can be done in early spring after all danger of frost, but before the major spring growth spurt begins. Remove weak or damaged limbs and crossing branches that might rub together. Suckers, growth emerging below the graft, should be removed any time they are observed. Occasional thinning will help light penetrate the canopy. You can prune the top to keep them at a convenient height for harvesting and you can prune back anything that gets in the way.

Production: Grafted orange trees should bear harvestable fruit in the third year from planting. Fruit that forms in the first two years should be removed to direct all energy into the development of a strong root system and canopy growth.

Watering: All fruit trees should get consistent water in the first few years. Watering can come from rain or a hose. During the first year, if the soil under the mulch is dry, provide the tree with about 7 gallons of water per week, preferably once a week. Water slowly. This can be a little more than 3 minutes with a ½" hose and 1 ½ minutes with a 5/8" hose. Remember to account for rainfall when determining how much to water with a hose. Citrus should never have wet feet.

Fertilizing: Do not fertilize the first spring. You can begin fertilizing with a slow release organic fertilizer during the first summer's growth. Apply 2 cups of cottonseed meal or slow release organic fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter in February and May each year.

Harvesting: Grapefruits and pummelos will begin ripening in mid- to late-October, even though their skins may still be green at this time. Citrus changes color in response to cold weather. Begin tasting on a weekly basis. Grapefruits and pummelos hold very well on the tree and can be harvested as late as May or until they fall from the tree. They will get larger and sweeter the longer they remain on the tree, although the red varieties will begin to fade in January through March.

Pests: If you notice the leaves on new growth starting to curl, it is most likely citrus leaf miner. This insect affects the new leaves of most citrus. You can spray Neem Oil or Spinosad on the new growth when it is the size of a mouse ear. Spray both sides of leaves, and repeat treatment every week to ten days. This may stop the leaf miner, and it may not. The tree will still grow and produce even though the leaf miner attacks the leaves. Once the plant gets tall, you likely won't see the damage. Many growers ignore this problem since it is largely cosmetic.

Winter Protection: Without protection, grapefruits can be expected to survive down to 22° F without damage. Young trees are more susceptible to freezes than mature trees. Bloomsweet is slightly hardier; down to the mid-teens. Pile mulch or leaves against the base to protect the graft if predictions exceed the safe temperature range. If the tree is small enough, tent the tree with a blanket or frost cloth. Do not "wrap" the tree. Protect trees less than two feet tall with a large plastic bin or cardboard box covered with a tarp. Prior to tenting or covering, place a bucket of water beside the trunk. Water gives off heat when it freezes. If you trap this heat inside the covering, it can keep the temperature inside the cover a few degrees higher. Suggested minimum temperatures are based on mature trees. Young trees are less hardy and require protection at higher temperatures.

Varieties for the 2020 Sale

Grapefruit: *Bloomsweet, Cocktail, Oro Blanco, Rio Red, Ruby Red*
Pummelo: *Chandler, Nam Roi, Valentine*

Varieties for Southeast Texas

Bloomsweet Grapefruit: This Asian citrus is a hefty yellow grapefruit, with thin skin and very juicy, sweet, pale flesh. It is possibly a pummelo-yuzu cross. It is evergreen, 20' – 30' with a 15' spread, and amazingly fragrant blossoms. People who like sweet grapefruit consider it among the best flavored of any grapefruit. It is easy to peel & segment, and ripens November through December, but can be picked in April and eaten as late as June with refrigeration. It is also the most cold-hardy grapefruit. Large trees may even survive 14° F.

Cocktail Grapefruit: This popular variety is actually a cross between a mandarin orange and a pummelo. They have a bright tangerine flavor with a clean, refreshing grapefruit finish. These fruits also lack the acidic bite of regular grapefruit. It is a good juicer – the juice has a distinct grapefruit flavor, without the acid bite. On trifoliolate rootstock, it is hardy to the lower 20's.

Golden Grapefruit: Golden is a very low acid grapefruit with an orangey-flavor and a beautiful golden orange interior. It is sweeter than most grapefruit and has a wonderful aroma. It is very juicy, and has a tendency to be a bit seedy.

Oro Blanco Grapefruit: White-fleshed, low acid, grapefruit-pummelo cross. Sweet, juicy fruits with no bitterness. The rind is a bit thick, but peels easily to reveal a delicate, seedless, easy to section fruit. Ripens in early winter.

Rio Red Grapefruit: This is the most popular of the red Rio Grand Valley grapefruits. It is a large-sized tree that produces at an early age. Fruit is oblong, sweet, seedless, and low in acid. The pulp and flesh is deep red and it has high juice content. Juice is also red. On trifoliolate rootstock, it is hardy to the lower 20's.

Ruby Red Grapefruit: This is the 1929 original that started the commercial success of red grapefruit in Texas with Rio Red, Ruby Sweet, and Rio Star to follow. When given an open area in full sun, it is a fast growing tree. Fruit is bright yellow when ripe, often with a red blush spot. Flesh is deep red and seedless. On TF rootstock, it is hardy to the lower 20's.

Chandler Pummelo: This huge, thick-skinned fruit can weigh up to 9 pounds! Flavorful, sweet flesh is deep pink in color. A vigorous, spreading tree. It is ripe September to December. The rind is thick, and by December, bright yellow with an occasional pink blush. The flesh ranges from light to dark pink, is moderately juicy and nicely sweet. This fruit is easily segmented and seeded. Chandler is also an excellent source of antioxidant flavonoids and vitamin C. It has taken brief temperatures of 22° F.

Hirado Pummelo: This is a pink-fleshed fruit that is exceptionally sweet with none of the grapefruit tartness. It is an heirloom Japanese "buntan", or pummelo. The fruit has some seeds and is often the size of a soccer ball. It is ripe in early fall and is the hardiest of all pummelos.

Nam Roi Pummelo: Popular seedless variety from Viet Nam, where it is called the “Honey Pummelo”. White-fleshed, sweet, easily separates from the skin.

Sarawak (Tahitian) Pummelo: Sarawak pummelo is from North Borneo. The tree is large and vigorous. The small to medium-large fruit is round with a flattened bottom and has a greenish-yellow rind that is thinner than the typically thick pummelo rind. The flesh is greenish, juicy, and sweet with a delicious mild lemon-lime flavor some refer to as melon-like. Fruit ripens in September to November and holds well on the tree. One of the best tasting pummelos. Cold hardiness here is unknown.

Valentine Pummelo: This beautiful pummelo got its name in part because it ripens on Valentine’s Day. It is heart-shaped when it is cut in cross-section and the flesh is a beautiful rosy color. ‘*Valentine*’ is a relatively new introduction from the breeding program at UC Riverside. It has pummelo, Dancy mandarin, and Ruby Blood Orange in its parentage. It is easy to peel, which comes from its mandarin parent, and ruby colored flesh from the blood orange. It has a complex flavor and is very low acid.