

Spring Fruit Tree Care

Alameda Backyard Growers Monthly Meeting, April 11, 2016

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WHAT HAPPENS TO DECIDUOUS FRUIT TREES IN SPRING?

Carbohydrates and nutrients, particularly nitrogen, are stored in the tree's roots and other woody tissues for later use in springtime flower and shoot growth. Active root growth begins one or more weeks before bud swell.

Apples, pears, plums, apricots and peaches usually blossom just before or simultaneously with vegetative growth. Persimmons and Pomegranates blossom after growth begins.

For most species, spring is a period of maximum fruit growth. In early stages, fruit growth is caused by cell division, whereas in the later stages most fruit growth is by cell expansion.

NATURAL FRUIT DROP / JUNE DROP

If the competition for nutrients is between the young fruit and the tree itself, your tree will sacrifice the lot so that it can live to fruit another year. Green leaves must produce sufficient carbon sugars and growth hormones to grow fleshy fruit and support seed production.

Varieties Most Commonly Affected by Fruit Drop:

Persimmons, apples, plums, pears, pomegranates, citrus, younger trees and trees under stress from lack of water, too much water, pests or disease.

Culling—or hand-thinning—stops the fruit tree from overcommitting itself, breaking branches from a too-heavy fruit load and/or setting itself up for alternate (biennial) bearing.

Peaches and nectarines should be thinned to one every 5 to 7 inches along the branch. Remove “doubles” and small, disfigured or damaged fruit as well.

Thin apricots and apriums to 3 to 5 inches apart. Plums and pluots, being larger fruit, should be spaced 4 to 6 inches apart.

Apples and pears produce a cluster of flowers and fruit from each bud. Thin to 1 fruit per cluster (if the overall crop is light, you can leave 2 fruit per cluster).

Retain the largest fruit whenever possible.

Quince do not need culling.

Persimmons are often not thinned, but thinning increases fruit size.

Pole Thinning (striking out-of-reach fruit or fruit clusters with a long pole lightly padded at its business end) can be used on large stone fruit trees where hand-thinning would be impractical or dangerous. This would work for apricots, plums or their hybrids, but not for peaches, apples, pears or persimmons.

FLOWER BUDS BEGIN TO FORM THE YEAR BEFORE

During late spring and summer, flower buds begin to form for the next spring's flowers. Excess fruit set in the spring may cause hormonal signals telling the tree to produce more vegetative buds and few flower buds (for next year). For this reason fruit thinning is necessary in many species to prevent alternate bearing patterns.



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Fruit Tree and Vine Care Calendar

NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT
1-pruning and dormant oil spray			3-paint tree trunks		4-fertilize young trees		4-fertilize young trees		2-prune apricots & cherries	
5-shothole fungus spray		8-peach leaf curl spray			6-fireblight spray			(7-fertilize mature trees after harvest, only if needed)		
9-brown rot spray				11-codling moth sanitation / bag covers on fruit			(10-apple maggots)			
12-powdery mildew sprays for grapes										

- Spray for brown rot mid-Feb. to end of March.
- Fertilize young trees in March and again in May.
- Apply fireblight spray mid-March to mid-May.
- Apply codling moth covers to apples, pears and quinces or spray with "Surround" Kaolin Clay barrier spray from the beginning of April to the beginning of September.

SPRING CITRUS CARE

Fertilizing

Citrus trees are heavy feeders and need to be fertilized about three times a year. A helpful way to remember when to fertilize them is by the holidays **Valentine's Day, Memorial Day and Labor Day**. Fertilize citrus trees on or around those dates according to the package instructions, which are based on the tree size.

Pruning

Spring is the time to begin pruning citrus trees, once the danger of frost has passed. Focus on removing dead, diseased and crossing branches.

Next, remove any suckers growing from the base of the tree, underneath the bud union (a swollen area where the top of the citrus tree has been grafted to the rootstock). Suckers are often thorny, and their foliage often looks a little different from the rest. Left alone, suckers will take over the citrus tree, leaving you with thorny branches and sour fruit.

Wayward branches or watersprouts that are growing out of proportion to the rest of the tree can be removed at this time as well. A general guideline is to remove no more than 20 percent of the foliage of a citrus tree in a given year, or it can become stressed and susceptible to environmental, insect or disease problems.

Citrus Pests in Alameda

Whiteflies, Aphids, Scale And The Ants Who Love Them, Snails, Squirrels, Rats, and the dreaded Asian Citrus Psyllid. It's not here yet, but it's reached Southern California through Mexico – and it's a major threat. Inspect your citrus regularly! If you ever think you've found the insect, immediately call California Dept. of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Exotic Pest Hotline at 1-800-491-1899.

WHITEFLY CONTROL TACTICS

Replace mulch under citrus

Spray:

Hose off the *undersides* of leaves with jets of water.

Use commercial insecticidal soap or light (veggie-based) horticultural oil (summer) spray, or Stir up this

Home-Made Whitefly Killer Recipe

In a 1-qt. Spray bottle, mix

1 TBSP Dr. Bronner's Peppermint Soap

1 TBSP Neem Oil

Fill spray bottle with water.

Apply in early morning or in evening, when beneficial insects & pollinators are away from the tree; this will give the spray time to dry on the leaves before the good guys arrive for their day's work.

Buy ladybugs and release them in the evening; they don't fly at night or when it's cooler. Be sure to water the garden well before releasing them.

Ladybugs are territorial: if they hatch in your garden, they will stay there.

RECOMMENDED READING

THE HOME ORCHARD, Growing Your Own Deciduous Fruit and Nut Trees

University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Publication 3485

THE HOLISTIC ORCHARD, Tree Fruits and Berries the Biological Way

By Michael Phillips

GOLDEN GATE GARDENING

By Pam Peirce

PESTS OF THE GARDEN AND SMALL FARM, A Grower's Guide to Using Less Pesticide

by Mary Louise Flint

Statewide Integrated Pest Management Project

University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources Publication 3332