

SPRING AND SUMMER CARE OF DECIDUOUS FRUIT TREES

By Tom Del Hotal

Spring and summer are the primary growing and fruit seasons for most deciduous fruit trees. It is this time of year that we need to pay special attention to irrigation practices in order to assure maximum fruit development and quality as well as tree health and growth. Watering practices should be reevaluated as trees grow and mature. The feeder root zone irrigated as well as the irrigation frequency and depth of the root zone irrigated may need to be modified as the season progresses. The following outline will help you to schedule tasks that will maximize tree health and fruit production. Timing each year will vary depending on the weather and this outline is intended to be modified according to the weather conditions.

Spring (February - April)

- * Fertilize trees with a complete balanced fertilizer such as 15-15-15, 16-16-16, 4-4-4, 8-8-8 or similar and increase the watering frequency as the trees break dormancy and the weather begins to get warmer and drier. Average watering frequency during this time of year should be one time every one or two weeks. During wet years, water one time every three weeks.
- * Apply copper banding to tree trunks or apply snail control products to prevent garden snail damage to new-growth and developing fruit.
- * Thin fruit after fruit set when the fruit is about 1/3 inch in size, to increase fruit size and to reduce the risk of limb breakage.

(April-June)

- * Fertilize trees to replenish nitrogen supplies as needed to promote healthy growth. Use light applications of conventional fertilizer, or use slow release or time release fertilizer, or organic fertilizer to reduce the risk of over fertilizing and promoting fruit drop.
- * Mulch trees after fertilizing with an organic mulch or combination of organic mulch and compost. Apply 2"- 3" of mulch a few inches away from the tree trunk extending to outside the tree drip line.
- * Prevent ants from farming aphids, scale, whitefly and other honey dew producing insects by using tangle foot as a barrier around tree trunks or other ant control products. Prune away any branches which touch the ground to prevent access into trees for ants and snails.
- * Watch for gopher activity and control potentially damaging gophers with traps, baits, or oilier control measures. Continue with vigilance throughout the spring, summer and fall seasons.

- * Control insects or other pests as needed. Repeat and time control programs for best results.
- * Apply bird netting or use other bird repelling measures to protect ripening fruit from bird damage.

Summer (Mid June - September)

- * Discontinue fertilizers during the hotter months of the year. Apply light applications as needed only if deficiency symptoms occur.
- * Remove bird netting from the tree (if used) after fruit has been harvested.
- * Continue to monitor trees for insects or other pests and use control measures as needed.
- * Use summer pruning techniques to shape trees and control growth. Limit pruning to removal of no more than 20% - 30% of foliage.
- * Whitewash the bark of trees in areas of hotter temperatures or anytime the bark of the trunk or of the branches are at risk of sunburn damage. Use interior latex water based paint thinned 50% with water. Take **care** to prevent excess paint from coating the leaves.
- * Adjust irrigation schedules, watering area and volume to accommodate for increasing temperatures and lower humidity as well as drying winds. Bark beetles and other tree boring insects often attack stressed trees. To reduce the risk of these **tree killers**, keep trees well watered and avoid excessive pruning damage.