

HEALTHY HOME ORCHARDS

The most important thing you can apply to keep your fruit trees healthy is your attention. Planning, observation, and good orchard hygiene go a long way toward a bounty of beautiful and delicious fruit. Here are some basics that apply to almost all kinds of fruit trees.

WELL BEGUN IS HALF DONE: SETTING UP THE ORCHARD

- Make sure your trees will receive at least 6 hours of direct sun.
- Choose and plant disease resistant varieties, or choose fruits that have fewer pest and disease issues, like figs, persimmons, or mulberries.
- Know your drainage. Very few fruits will thrive on a site that is waterlogged: build it up, if low-lying ground is all you have. Cherries are particularly sensitive.
- Know the pollination requirements for the fruits you want to grow. Many require two or more trees for best fruit production.
- Allow good tree spacing for sun and air penetration.
- Provide for regular deep watering, but not overhead watering.
- Mulch within the drip line, but not against the trunk.
- Closely related ornamentals (crabapples, ornamental cherries, etc.) can harbor diseases and pests; monitor them closely or avoid planting them.
- Plant diverse flowering plants (sweet alyssum, chives, yarrow, clover, etc.) to attract beneficial insects; this is more effective than trying to introduce them later. Aphid trap crops like nasturtiums can also attract aphid eaters. Be aware that insecticides will harm beneficial insects, both pollinators and predators.
- Establish mason bees and other native bees in your orchard for pollination.
- Learn the most common pests and diseases that affect the fruits you are growing. See our fruit-specific *Care Schedules*. Knowing the life cycles of those pests is important.

REGULAR MAINTENANCE IS PREVENTIVE CARE (A.K.A. THE BEST CARE)

Healthy plants are less susceptible to disease and insects – preventative care reduces the need for reactive care *and* makes for better fruit. After appropriate location and pruning, thorough hygiene is the best line of defense against some of the most troublesome problems.

- Have a pruning plan for your tree and follow it. Prune out dead or diseased wood especially, and prune for structure and air flow. Most fruit trees will require pruning at least once a year.
- Keep your garden clean by clearing fallen, damaged, or mummified fruit, and leaves promptly. This will help to rid the garden of over-wintering insect eggs and fungus spores. Be sure to remove and discard the debris rather than composting it.
- Watch for your fruit's most common problems. See our fruit-specific *Care Schedules* for when to monitor. Check with online resources, a knowledgeable friend, the Extension Service, or our staff to verify your diagnosis and plan treatment. Not every insect or bit of damage should be treated. It is often best to tolerate a small amount of damage instead of spraying, because some insects killed by insecticides are allies.
- Fertilize your trees in spring, according to the directions. Overfertilizing can cause plants to be more susceptible to disease and damage, and more attractive to pests.
- Weeds near your trees can harbor pests and diseases.

WHEN PROBLEMS CROP UP

Understanding the problem, monitoring, and proper timing are critical with organic fruit tree care. Spraying at the wrong time is a waste of time and money and may be harmful. But don't put it off: it is much easier to treat a problem in the early stages of infection, especially if you have multiple trees.

- Always identify a problem before spraying anything. Sometimes if you catch it early you can manage it with only cultural practices, like pruning and hygiene. Small amounts of cosmetic damage are not worth spraying for.
- Note that most traps are primarily useful for monitoring, rather than control – they let you know when treatment will be most effective.
- Always read the directions on products for proper timing with regards to weather conditions and frequency, dilution, and cautions. Make sure the product is labeled for the problem you are trying to treat. Even materials that are considered organic can be harmful, especially if used improperly.
- Pay close attention to the weather when spraying: ideally a dry window without wind is the best time to spray. Sprays like oils and soaps need to thoroughly cover the pest in question to be effective.

RESOURCES

Online Publications

Pacific Northwest Insect Management Handbook. Oregon State University. <http://pnwhandbooks.org/insect>

Pacific Northwest Disease Management Handbook. Oregon State University. <http://pnwhandbooks.org/plantdisease>

Growing Tree Fruits and Nuts in the Home Orchard. Oregon State University Extension Service. 2009.
<https://extension.oregonstate.edu/pub/ec-810>

Managing Diseases and Insects in Home Orchards. Oregon State University. 2020.
<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec631>

Websites

OSU Extension Service Ask An Expert. <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/ask-expert>

Metro Area Master Gardener Hotline <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/mg/metro/have-gardening-question>

Books

Pruning & Training (New Revised Edition) Brickell, Christopher; Joyce, David. 2017 (earlier editions available).

Pests of the Garden and Small Farm. Flint, Mary Louise. Regents of the University of California: Oakland, CA. 2018.

The Fruit Gardener's Bible: A Complete Guide to Growing Fruits and Nuts in the Home Garden. Hill, Lewis; Perry Leonard. Storey Publishing. North Adams, MA. 2011.

