



HOME & GARDEN

Home and Garden information center • 12005 Homewood Road • Ellicott City, MD 21042 • 1-800-342-2507

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Fruit Tips

Culture

- New fruit plants can be set out as long as the soil is not wet. If you receive bare-rooted plants and cannot get them planted right away, keep them in a cool, dry, well-ventilated area where they will not freeze. Keep the roots moist by covering with moist sawdust or shredded newspaper.
- When ordering apple trees, be sure you know the exact rootstock you are ordering. If you're considering strawberries, try some of these June-bearing cultivars - Earliglo, Allstar, Cavendish, and Annapolis. Apache, Arapaho and Navaho are erect, thornless blackberry cultivars with good flavor that require no support and work well in backyard gardens.
- Before planting a backyard orchard, give particular attention to air and water drainage. Avoid low frost pockets, where cold air gathers, or year after year flower buds may freeze and drop. Peach, cherry, nectarine and apricot blooms are particularly susceptible to freeze damage. Fruit crops are very susceptible to root rot if planted in heavy, slow draining soils. So good water drainage is also important. Newly planted fruit trees will need careful watering and even when established they will still need regularly irrigation to help the fruit develop properly so a nearby water source is helpful.
- During the growing season even young non-bearing fruit trees still need to be managed for insect pests and diseases.
- Don't rush to remove mulch from strawberries. Leave it over your plants to protect them from late cold spells. When plants start to grow, the mulch must be removed to allow leaves to develop in the light. If leaves develop under the mulch, they will become blanched and yellow from lack of chlorophyll, and may burn and die when exposed to the sun.
- Small fruits such as brambles can be pruned starting now through the bloom period. Remove the fruited, dead canes of brambles and any flowering canes that are weak, diseased or infested with borers. Fall bearing raspberry plants should have been mowed to the ground, but if they haven't, do so now.
- Apple and pear trees can also be pruned at this time. Remove dead, broken and crossing branches and keep younger trees trained with a central leader much like a Christmas tree shape. Firelight damage on apples and pears should be pruned off now to lessen the chance of spreading this bacterial infection. Peach trees should be pruned after flowering. For peach trees, maintain an open vase shape to encourage good air circulation and fruiting throughout. Shorten all the branches and thin out weak growth.
- All fruit plants can be fertilized at this time except strawberries which are best fertilized in August. Peach trees usually require an annual early spring application of a balanced fertilizer. Be careful not to over-fertilize apple trees with nitrogen. Too much nitrogen can lead to excessive, weak growth and promote disease and insect pest problems. If apple and pear trees are healthy, fruitful, and making 12-18 inches of new shoot growth each year, they don't need to be fertilized at all. Bramble plants should be fertilized now with a top dressing of a balanced fertilizer (i.e. 10-10-10) or 2-3 inches of compost. Blueberry plants should be fertilized with ammonium sulfate at bloom and again when fruits first appear. Apply the fertilizer in a ring 12 inches from the base of each blueberry plant.
- Take an inventory of pesticide sprays you anticipate using. Do you have enough? Has it been stored properly? If a material was exposed to freezing temperatures it may no longer be effective. If you have questions call the pesticide manufacturer, using the phone number listed on the label.

Educating People To Help Themselves

Local Governments - U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

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Insect

- Dormant oil sprays are very effective at reducing populations of some tree fruit pests, including scales, spider mites, and aphids. However, dormant oil sprays will burn open leaf and flower buds. If green tissue is showing, apply horticultural oil at the less concentrated summer, 2% rate. Be sure that temperatures are expected to remain above freezing for a 24 hour period after spraying oils or else damage to them may occur.

Disease

- Liquid lime sulfur is a safe and inexpensive material that can be sprayed on raspberry, and blackberry plants prior to bud swell to prevent cane diseases. It should also be applied to peach trees when buds begin to swell, but before green tissue is visible, to help prevent peach leaf curl disease. Liquid lime sulfur can burn green tissue. If green tissue is showing, use a fungicide registered for these fruit crops.
- Bordeaux mix can be applied to apple and pear trees from budswell to green tip stage to reduce the incidence of firelight. Never spray dormant oil within 10 days of a sulfur-containing spray. Fixed copper products can also be used, but spray at the silver tip stage.
- Firelight damage on apples and pears should be pruned out prior to blooming. This will lessen the chance of spreading this bacterial infection later in the spring.

Have a pest or gardening question?
Call the Home and Garden Information Center
800-342-2507
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