



# HOME & GARDEN

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

September 2009

## Fruit Tips

### Culture

- Harvest figs when they soften slightly. Ants may enter the small eye at the bottom of the fruit as the fig ripens. This is a small price to pay for fresh, tree-ripened figs. If you are having problems with birds or squirrels, you will need to invest in some bird netting to cover your plants. Some gardeners complain that their figs do not ripen before frost. This could be due to low light conditions, having a late maturing cultivar, and dieback the previous winter.
- Avoid the temptation to buy bargain fruit trees this fall they may be stressed and of poor quality. Planting fruit trees requires planning and site preparation. The soil needs to be tested and amended prior to planting. Fruit trees tend to grow off better when planted in the spring.
- Remove and dispose of all rotted or fallen fruits from trees, vines and bushes. This will help reduce the amount of disease inoculum and number of insect pests that over-winter and attack your orchard next spring.
- Pears are beginning to ripen. Most pear cultivars are picked when background color begins to lighten but fruits are still firm. Pears should be kept in the refrigerator and brought to room temperature to ripen. Asian pears should be allowed to ripen on the tree.
- Pick an apple every few days when harvest time approaches to determine the peak harvest time. Harvesting fruit before peak ripeness will help you to minimize problems with yellow jackets and sap beetles. Also, keep rotted and fallen fruit picked up to avoid problems with yellow jackets. Ripening apples may be showing signs of various summer rots and should be picked and discarded. Apples with small, dry, brown spots under the skin may be suffering from bitter pit, caused by a lack of calcium in the fruit. To prevent this problem from re-occurring, don't over-fertilize your trees and have your soil tested and spread limestone around the trees this fall if calcium levels are low.
- Prune out the dead raspberry and blackberry canes that fruited this past summer. Fall fruiting raspberries like 'Josephine', 'Caroline' and 'Heritage' can be mowed to the ground in late winter.
- Consider re-planting strawberry beds next spring if production has been greatly reduced by disease and weeds. Remove spent plants this fall and work in organic matter.
- If you experienced poor growth in blueberries this season it is likely caused by soil problems. Have your soil tested and amend your soil accordingly.
- This fall, protect fruit plants and trees from winter vole feeding by keeping organic mulches away from the trunk and surrounding the trunk with pea gravel. The pea gravel makes it very difficult for voles to dig around the trunks and chew on them. You can also surround the trunks with hardware cloth that extends a few inches below the soil line.

**Have a pest or gardening question? Call the Home and Garden Information Center**

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