



HOME & GARDEN

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

August 2009

Fruit Tips

Culture

- The typical heat and dryness of a Maryland summer has finally arrived and many fruit plants are showing symptoms of water stress; these include leaf browning, small fruit size and fruit drop. To help assure a good fruit crop keep all fruit plants well watered during these hot, dry periods. Most of them are also forming buds for next year's crop. Prevent water stress now to prevent these important fruit buds from shriveling.
- If you must apply a pesticide, spray during the coolest parts of the day and follow label directions closely. Pears are beginning to ripen. Asian pears should be allowed to ripen on the tree. European pears, however, ripen from the inside out and should be picked when a change in background color is observed. Store pears in a refrigerator or other cool, dark location. Keeping them on the tree until they are fully ripe will result in the centers becoming rotten. Bring them to room temperature to ripen. Harvest figs when they are slightly soft. They may suffer minor insect damage during the ripening process and 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, invest in some bird netting to cover your bushes.
- Peaches will ripen this month; pick when their background color changes from pale green to yellow or white and before fruits become fully ripened. This will reduce the incidence of brown rot disease. Bring peaches indoors, submerge briefly in a 1:10 bleach to water solution to help prevent rot, and then allow them to ripen in the kitchen.

Insects

- Harvesting fruit before peak ripeness helps minimize problems with yellow jackets and sap beetles. Yellow jacket bottle traps are commercially available and can help reduce their infestation of your fruit.
- Remove and dispose of all rotted or fallen fruits and foliage from trees, vines and bushes. This will help reduce the amount of disease inoculum and number of insect pests, especially apple maggot, that over-winter and attack your orchard next spring.
- Apples that have small red spots with a light colored or black center on apples may have San Jose scale. This sucking insect attacks the leaves, branches and fruits of fruit trees. If you pry open the scale cover you can observe, with a magnifying glass, the crawlers underneath. Control this pest with a dormant oil spray this fall after leaves drop and by pruning out severely infested branches now.
- Be on the lookout for peach tree borer damage. The borers typically enter the lower trunk around the soil line and feed on the cambium. They kick out a mixture of frass (saw dust) and sap which can be scraped away to expose the feeding tunnels. See HG 77, IPM Series: Stone Fruits for more information.
- Chestnut weevil adults are active laying eggs in chestnut burrs. Monitor this small grayish weevil by tapping branches while holding a white sheet of paper underneath. (Destroy weevils that fall onto the paper.) Otherwise, the larvae of the weevil will destroy the chestnut while it is in storage. Nuts should be collected daily as they fall to the ground. Store the nuts in a freezer and thaw out as you need them. This "sanitation" technique will also help to reduce their infestation. Another technique that has worked well is to immerse infested chestnuts in hot (122 deg F) water for 45 minutes. This will kill any larvae before storage. Cool and dry chestnuts before storing.
- Spider mite populations are high in hot, dry weather. You'll notice yellowing leaves that look dusty or dirty on the underside. Mites are pinpoint size sucking pests that can be observed on leaf undersides with the unaided eye. Keeping plants' foliage hosed

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down periodically during hot dry weather can help control them. Spraying insecticidal soap or horticultural oil on mite-damaged plants during hot weather can cause serious leaf burn. If you notice spider mite damage, consider purchasing and releasing beneficial mites, which will hunt down and consume the pest mites.

- To prevent birds from feeding on blueberries and grapes try using the shiny mylar tape available through garden supply catalogs and garden centers. Tie the tape to branches or other supports near fruit allowing it to move in the breeze.

Disease

- Ripening apples showing various summer rots 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 add calcium this fall if calcium levels are low. Calcium is added by applying gypsum or lime to the soil. Apply amount based on soil test recommendation.
- Brown rot on stone fruits causes fruits to rot and mummify. Healthy looking fruits may be infected and begin to breakdown just before or after harvest. Continue a regular spray program with a labeled fungicide and remove and destroy infected fruits immediately.
- Black rot of grapes can also be a serious problem. Pick off infected grapes and rake up and discard fallen leaves. Prune grape leaves that surround fruit clusters to encourage air movement and drying.

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

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