



HOME & GARDEN

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

October 2009

Fruit Tips

Culture

- 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 should be tested and amended prior to planting.
- Figs are continuing to ripen across the state. Pick figs when they turn color and the skin becomes wrinkled or droopy. The small eye on the bottom of the fig will usually begin to open during ripening. This eye may allow ants to enter but they will quickly depart when disturbed. If your vigorous fig tree did not fruit this summer, try pruning the roots next spring by inserting a shovel into the ground at several points around the tree – 2 ft. out from the trunk. Once fig trees have dropped their leaves they should be insulated from freezing temperatures with leaves, straw or tarps. Any exposed wood is vulnerable to winter damage. (Temperatures below 20° F.)
- Harvesting fruit before peak ripeness will help to minimize problems with yellow jackets and sap beetles. Yellow jacket bottle traps are commercially available. Apples can be fully ripened by placing them in a paper bag at room temperature. European pears are ready to harvest when the background color changes from solid green to a greenish yellow. The breathing pores on the fruits, called lenticels, will also turn from white to brown. European pears ripen from the core out. They will be over-ripe if allowed to soften on the tree. Store pears in a refrigerator or other cool, dark location. Bring them to room temperature to ripen. Asian pears should be allowed to ripen on the tree.
- Fruit plants can be pruned anytime during dormancy after leaf drop. However, it is best to wait until late winter or very early spring so that the full effects of winter weather can be assessed. Prune out the dead raspberry and blackberry canes that fruited this past summer. Fall fruiting raspberries, like ‘Caroline’, should be mowed to the ground in late winter.
- If you experienced poor growth in blueberries this season have your soil tested and amend your soil accordingly. Blueberries grow best in a soil with a pH between 4.5 and 5.2 and one that is high in organic matter.
- 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.
- You may notice small red spots that have a light colored or black center on your apples. This is San Jose scale, a sucking insect that attacks the leaves, branches and fruits of fruit trees. If you pry open the scale cover you can observe, with a hand lens or magnifying glass, the settled crawlers. This pest can be controlled with a dormant oil spray after leaf drop and by pruning out infested branches. Scale insect problems often increase when beneficial insects are killed by the season-long use of broad-spectrum insecticides.
- Brown rot on stone fruits causes fruits to mummify. If you had this disease problem this year, reduce its chances for next year by removing all mummified fruit and fruit stems from trees and from the ground and throwing them in the trash.
- Be on the lookout for peach tree borer damage. The borers enter the lower trunk around the soil line and feed on the cambium. They kick out a mixture of frass and sap, which can be scraped away to expose the feeding tunnels. Insert a fine flexible wire into these holes and kill the borer.

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

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