

## FALL IN THE FRUIT ORCHARD

Fall is a busy time for fruit growers. In our area it's a season of planting and harvest as well as the time to prepare the trees for the upcoming winter and spring seasons. A few simple steps taken now can insure you pick the best quality fruit, and your trees stay healthy and productive for years to come.

**HARVESTING FALL FRUITS** Citrus, pecans, jujube, chestnut, pomegranate, persimmon, pineapple guava, kiwi and pear all ripen in the fall season. Knowing when to pick these fruits is critical to their flavor and how long they will store. For best flavor harvest your fruit daily. The best time to pick is in the cool of the morning. To insure they will keep the longest put your fruit in the fridge as soon as possible.

**KEEP WATERING YOUR TREES** well into late October. To insure you are giving the plant enough water, set up a catch pan under the trees and water until you get at least one inch in the pan. This amount will insure the water goes deep into the root system, anything less will only dampen the surface.

**RAKE FALLEN LEAVES** Many of the diseases that attack your tree overwinter in the leaves that fall from your trees each year. Removing them from the orchard will break the disease cycle and save you a lot of spraying next year.

**BUILD YOUR SOIL FOR NEXT SEASON.** Fall is the natural time of the year to begin the cycle of building healthy soil. In nature it's the time that leaves drop and the cool weather and winter rains work to turn the leaves into compost. Take a cue from nature and apply a thick layer of hay or leaves under the canopy of your fruit trees. Growing a cover crop of clover, winter rye, buckwheat, or oats in the pathways between your trees is another great way to improve the quality of your soil. Fall is the best season to adjust the pH of your soil. If you've had problems with your plants not performing well last season, send a soil sample off through your county agent; it may be the source of the problem.

**AVOID LATE FERTILIZING AND PRUNING** These are jobs best done in late winter or early spring. Late fertilizing or pruning can stimulate growth that would be damaged in an early frost.

**GET YOUR TREES PREPPED FOR WINTER** many fruit trees are prone to sunscald in the winter. This damage takes place during periods of warm days and sharp drops in night time temperature. Painting the trunks of peach, plum, nectarine and apples is a good

preventative measure. Use a watered down interior latex paint and be sure to cover the entire trunk to the lower scaffold limbs.

Fall is the time to get your frost protection system worked out. Many fruits like citrus, pomegranate, and fig will need to be protected against hard freezes the first couple years of their life. It pays to be prepared early.

**PLANT MORE TREES** Fall is the ideal time to plant the winter hardy fruit trees in our area. Fall set trees go into the spring with a well established root system and are more stable and drought tolerant than trees set at any other time of the year.

Growing your own fruit trees is the sure way to enjoy the full flavor that only fruit from your own trees can offer, and is often the only way to get some of the more interesting fruits on your table. Taking a little time during the cool months of fall to tend and plant some fruit trees can be an enjoyable hobby that will pay off for years to come.

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