

Fruit Tree Happenings and Care

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

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Fruit trees may drop small, undeveloped fruit in June. Finding a number of small fruits on the ground can cause concern all fruit will drop but this will not happen. For the most part, June drop is a good thing. Instead of growers having to manually thin fruit, the tree does some of it.

Why does some fruit drop and not others? Dropped fruits may not have been fully pollinated. Without complete pollination, they won't develop normally and drop off. With rainy weather, pollinators may not have been as active this spring. And it's important not to apply insecticides to trees during blooming.

Along with rain comes clouds and less sunshine and photosynthesis may be reduced. This, along with a hot, dry summer last year, may have caused a tree to not have quite enough carbohydrates to support as many fruits. If a tree had a heavy crop last year, this can cause it to be a little short on carbohydrates too and fruit are dropped to compensate.

June drop is typically a good thing. It can benefit trees and lead to larger, sweeter fruit; less branch breakage; and annual fruit production. If a tree does not drop fruit naturally and has an abundant crop, some fruit should be manually thinned.

June is the month to thin fruit, especially on smaller trees. It may not be feasible on larger trees except from lower branches. The rule of thumb is to remove excess fruit before they reach one inch in diameter.

Some growers remove one of two fruit that will end up touching one another at maturity. As a rule, apples and pears are spaced six to eight inches. Apricots and plums are spaced two to four inches and peaches three to five inches. For home orchards, fruit thinning is done by hand or by pole.

Another fruit tree chore during summer is removing suckers from the base of trunks and water sprouts from branches. Water sprouts are narrow twigs that grow straight up off of branches. If left, suckers can take food reserves from trees and water sprouts may become dense and create shade to reduce production.

During hot, dry spells, water fruit trees with about one to two inches of water per week. Moisten soil 8 to 12 inches deep from near the trunk to well beyond the dripline or outer branches. Keep in mind the roots that take up moisture are in the upper foot of soil and spread outward to a distance at least the trees height.

If you follow a fruit tree spray schedule for pest control, continue according to label directions. Use pesticides labeled for edible fruit trees. Once rainy weather passes, the need for fungicides is greatly reduced. Insecticides likely need to be applied longer if a high level of control is desired.

Apple is the tree with the most pest issues. If the goal of spraying is to avoid wormy apples, codling moths lay eggs on developing fruit in late May and June. Then the apple maggot adult fly begins to lay eggs in July. Unless you know which apple pest you're dealing with, continued spraying is needed.

Cedar apple rust and apple scab are the most common diseases. Rust produces orangish spots on leaves and apple scab causes green spots that turn to blighted or brown areas and leaf drop. With our rainy spring, we are likely to see an increase in these diseases but we are past the ideal time to apply fungicides.

Fungicides need to be applied to susceptible trees just as they begin to leaf out in spring with repeat applications made as long the weather remains cool and rainy. Once a tree is infected, fungicides are not effective. When hotter, dryer weather arrives, fungal infections are greatly reduced and many growers will stop applying fungicides after the first two or three applications.