

Spring Care of Fruit Trees

Spring is here and one of the first signs of spring is the blossoming of fruit trees with the promise of sweet fruit in the late summer and fall. If you are looking forward to your own backyard fruit harvest, you will need to protect your fruit trees from pests and disease and to provide them with the nutrition and care they need to produce abundant fruit.

In early spring, fertilize all fruit trees with an organic or synthetic, nitrogen-based fertilizer. Exception: trees younger than two years old should not be fertilized. A balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10 should be used before buds break open in the early spring. Clear all grass and weeds from the base of younger trees. Weeds and grass can result in the young tree struggling to compete for nutrients in the soil, resulting in slow growth and production.

Late February to early April is the best time to prune fruit trees. The goal of pruning is to shape the tree for the space and to open up the interior of the tree so air can circulate freely. Pruning should be done before leaves break out in the early spring. Summer pruning of fruit trees is not recommended; however, water sprouts that emerge at the base of the tree can be pruned at any time.

Pests and disease control is crucial. Dormant oil sprays can be used just before the tree fully comes out of dormancy. It is important to remember that, with pesticides, all directions on the container should be closely followed. More does not mean better and over use of pesticides can pose an environmental or health risk. It is always important to properly dispose of pesticides and left-over pesticide should never be poured down the drain. Clean sprayers after use and do not use sprayers for trees that have previously contained herbicides. In April, common problems for apple trees include: apple scab, powdery mildew, sooty blotch, bitter rot, black rot, fly speck, and cedar apple rust. Pests, such as aphids and mites, are also becoming active in the early spring. For peaches and other

stone fruit, brown rot, peach scab, and bacterial spot can become prevalent as can several pests such as mites and borers. It is very important not to spray pesticides when the tree is blooming as pesticides can harm pollinators such as bees that visit your fruit trees. Bees are our friends and, through their hard work, the fruit tree is successfully pollinated. Clearly, no bees = no fruit.

One of the best references for a fruit tree spraying schedule is a fact sheet from the University of Missouri sheet which can be found at <http://www.tulsamastergardeners.org/lawn--garden-help/ewExternalFiles/MU%20Fruit%20Spray.pdf>

Additional information on pest management for fruit trees can be found on OSU Extension Fact Sheet [EPP-7319](#) (*Home Fruit Tree Production and Pest Management*).