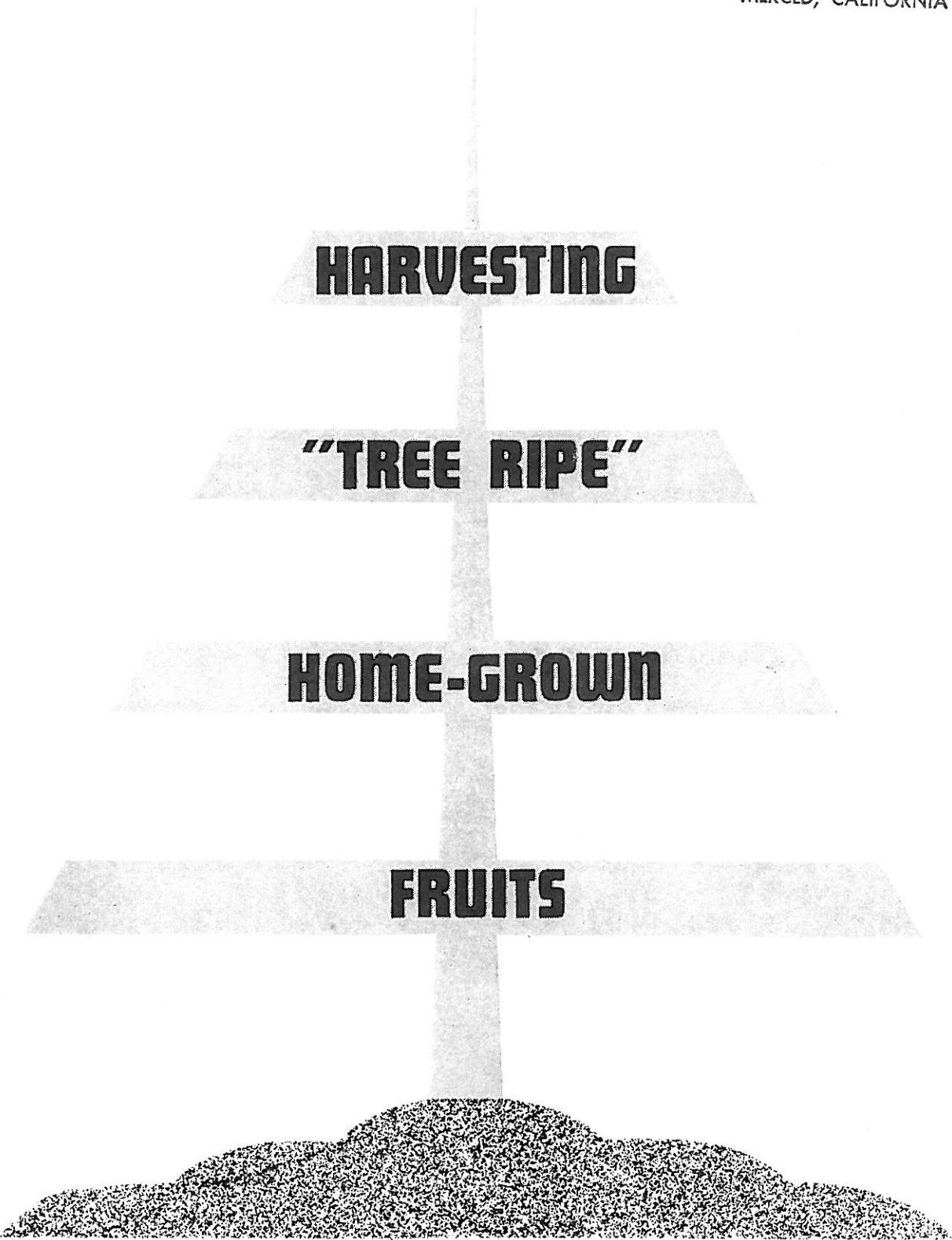




**HARVESTING**

**"TREE RIPE"**

**HOME-GROWN**

**FRUITS**

Division of Agricultural Sciences  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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# HARVESTING "TREE RIPE"

## HOME-GROWN FRUITS

The popular ideal of a tree-ripened fruit is a fruit that has been allowed to reach optimum flavor, sugar, juiciness, texture, and color before harvest. This is a luxury that a home orchardist can enjoy since there need be no delay from the "tree to the table."

Fruit maturation or ripening is an extremely involved physiochemical process. Fortunately, there are a few simple, common indicators you can use to determine when the fruit has reached that delectable stage known as "tree ripe."

### Skin Color

Skin color—the most obvious indicator of ripeness on many fruits—can often be separated into two main parts. The most noticeable factor is the overlaying or predominant color that is commonly referred to as the skin color. It is a crude method for approximating the fruit's ripeness.

The other factor—**ground color**—is inconspicuous on most fruits, but is a fairly good indicator of properly mature fruit. On red apple varieties, for example, the ground color is visible between the red stripes and quite often shows through around the stem and blossom end.

### Fruit Firmness

Firmness is another useful way to estimate fruit maturity. It is particularly helpful in gauging the degree of ripeness in soft fruits, like peaches, nectarines, plums, persimmons, and apricots.

### Seed Color

In apples and pears, you can tell ripeness by the seed color if the ground color is not obvious. This involves cutting open the fruit to expose the seeds which are located in the center or core. If the seed coat color has turned completely brown, the remaining fruit is usually ripe enough to pick.

**The individual fruits** produced on fruit plants—from strawberries to apples, from avocados to oranges—never ripen simultaneously. Fruit at the top and on the outside of the tree tends to ripen ahead of that on the inside. Do not pick the entire crop at one time. Plan to make two or more harvests.

The following table is useful as an approximate guide in judging when the fruits on your home orchard trees are ready to pick.

| FRUIT                         | APPROXIMATE HARVEST DATES      | SKIN COLOR                                                                                                | GROUND COLOR                                                               | SEED OR PIT                                                 | FLESH TEXTURE AND/OR FIRMNESS                                                                                                                                                  | REMARKS                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Apples,<br>red<br>—<br>yellow | July to October                | Stripes and/or blush change from dull- to bright-red                                                      | Changes from green to yellow-green or yellow                               | Seeds should be solid, dark-brown                           | Should be crisp, juicy, somewhat melting                                                                                                                                       | When picked, fruit should release easily from tree—stem intact                                                                                    |
|                               |                                | On certain varieties, a delicate blush overlays yellow base                                               | Turns to light yellow-green or yellow—often waxy in appearance             |                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                | Same as above<br>Fall and winter varieties store at 32° to 34° F.; higher storage temperatures shorten storage life                               |
| Apricots                      | Mid-May through June           | Changes from dull greenish-orange to bright yellow-orange                                                 | Changes to light yellow-green                                              | In most varieties, pit does not adhere to flesh when mature | Entire fruit yields to gentle hand pressure<br>Flesh tender and melting                                                                                                        | In warm valley areas, pit burn (breakdown or browning of flesh around pit) may occur—it is not directly associated with maturity                  |
| Avocado                       | — —                            | Changes from green to purple-green, or from bright-green to a duller greenish-yellow depending on variety | Skin becomes smoother<br>Small corky areas appear on some varieties        | Seed coat should be dark-brown, very thin                   | Fruit is firm at harvest<br>At peak ripeness after harvest, the fruit yields to gentle hand pressure                                                                           | Pick as the fruit matures<br>Make several pickings per tree—most avocados “store” well on the tree                                                |
| Blackberries                  | Mid-June to July, early August | Changes from red to black<br>Not all berries ripen together                                               | — —                                                                        | — —                                                         | Berries become soft, skin tender and easily damaged—sometimes shatter or break apart                                                                                           | Berries release readily<br>Place in refrigerator as soon as possible after picking                                                                |
| Cherries,<br>sweet            | Mid-May to Mid-July            | “Bing” type varieties turn dark almost mahogany red<br>“Royal Anne” types turn bright-red in patches      | Not visible on dark-red varieties<br>Royal Anne types turn yellow or cream | Partially adheres to flesh                                  | Fruit yields to gentle hand pressure<br>Skin becomes tender<br>Flesh is dark-red on Bing types; white to cream on Royal Anne types<br>Juicy, crisp, and sweet in all varieties | Fruit stems release easily from spur, but remain attached to cherry<br>Cool fruit as soon as possible—does not keep long even under refrigeration |

|                   |                   |                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                             |     |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                            |
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| Figs              | August to October | Turns from green to purple-green, or to purplish-brown, or to yellow depending on variety     | On dark varieties, changes to yellowish-green<br>On light or yellow varieties turns to golden-yellow                                                        | --- | Flesh turns from greenish-white to strawberry or to amber<br>Fruit bends over at the neck and yields to gentle hand pressure | Pick fresh figs with stems attached<br>Dried figs are left on tree to partially dry; then picked, trayed, and dried in sun |
| Table Grapes      | August to October | Fruit turns from green to reddish-amber, black, bluish, or golden-yellow depending on variety | Fruit of most varieties covered with attractive bloom<br>Ground color disappears on dark varieties<br>Changes to attractive light-yellow on white varieties | --- | Flesh becomes pale-green or pale-yellow, juicy, crisp, sweet, and almost melting                                             | Berries crush easily and tend to shatter (break apart) when ripe<br>Cut bunches from vine and cool as soon as possible     |
| Grapefruit, white | ---               | Pale to light-yellow rind that is medium-thin and smooth                                      | Green changing to pale- or light-yellow; may be greenish-yellow in some locations                                                                           | --- | Buff-colored, tender, very juicy, sweet, slightly subacid                                                                    | "Stores" well on tree<br>Fruit quality best under southern California conditions                                           |
| "pink"            |                   | Crimson blush over light-yellow; rind is medium thick                                         |                                                                                                                                                             |     | Light-pink to dark-buff<br>Tender, juicy, sweet, slightly subacid                                                            |                                                                                                                            |
| Lemons            | ---               | Yellow when fully mature<br>On Meyer, may have slight orange tinge                            | Green fading to yellow<br>Pick fruit when color begins to change                                                                                            | --- | Greenish-yellow to yellow<br>Eureka and Lisbon are acid, very juicy, tender<br>Meyer is highly juicy, tender                 | Fruit keeps well on tree, but if kept too long, tends to dry out or become too large                                       |
| Oranges           | ---               | Most varieties in California turn orange or deep orange when mature                           | Valencia variety may re-green in late season<br>In cooler areas, yellow-green may show through                                                              | --- | Deep yellow-orange, firm, juicy, slightly acid, good flavor                                                                  | Fruit keeps well on the tree                                                                                               |

| FRUIT              | APPROXIMATE HARVEST DATES  | SKIN COLOR                                                                                                                                      | GROUND COLOR                                                               | SEED OR PIT                                                                    | FLESH TEXTURE AND/OR FIRMNESS                                                                                                    | REMARKS                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Nectarines         | June to September          | Depends on variety—can turn from yellowish-orange to bright-orange, red, or occasionally reddish-pink<br>Color is solid or in irregular patches | Green changing to yellowish-cream<br>Not fully ripe until green disappears | — —                                                                            | Fruit yields to gentle hand pressure<br>Flesh color usually yellowish with red tinge near the pit<br>Juicy, melting, good flavor | Nectarines are smooth-skinned peaches and should be "spot" picked for best eating<br>Cool immediately after picking                                                                                                             |
| Peaches, freestone | Mid-May to September       | Same as above<br>Recent introductions may be solid bright-red with orange tint                                                                  | Same as above                                                              | In most freestone varieties, pit does not adhere to flesh when fruit is mature | Same as above                                                                                                                    | "Spot" pick fruit as it ripens<br>Cool fruit immediately after picking and eat within a day or two                                                                                                                              |
| Pears              | July to September, October | Harvest fruit when full size but still green in color<br>If allowed to ripen on tree, quality is impaired                                       | Ground color still overall green, but shows faint tinge of yellowish-green | Seeds should be light-brown to brown                                           | Flesh texture is buttery, juicy, and melting                                                                                     | "Ripen" harvested fruit in cool place (50° to 70° F.) until ground color turns light yellow-green<br>Hold winter varieties (Nellis, Anjou, Bosc) at 32° to 34° F. storage from time of harvest until ready to eat—1 to 4 months |
| Plums              | June to September          | Color may be solid or mottled, red, dark-blue, or purple                                                                                        | Yellow-green to yellow                                                     | — —                                                                            | Firm yet yielding to gentle hand pressure<br>Juicy and aromatic                                                                  | Cool fruit immediately after picking—does not keep long even under refrigeration                                                                                                                                                |
| Persimmons         | September to November      | Bright-orange, solid color                                                                                                                      |                                                                            | — —                                                                            | Soft, melting, juicy, and mildly subacid when ripe                                                                               | Leave on tree as long as possible<br>Fully sized and colored fruit may be picked and ripened off the tree<br>Fruit ripens slowly under refrigeration<br>Fruit has astringent taste if not mature                                |

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| Quince           | — —               | Bright light-yellow to yellow-green    | Brown | Firm, crisp; inclined to be tough<br>Subacid flavor, inclined to be astringent | Fruit ripens unevenly—leave on tree until fully yellow in color<br>Can be used in jams, jellies, and preserves                                                              |
| Raspberries, red | June to September | Fruit should be red to dark-red        | — —   | Fruit should be soft, aromatic, and juicy                                      | Fruit should release easily from cap regardless of variety or color<br>Carefully handle harvested fruit—the skin is very thin and tender<br>Immediately chill after picking |
| black            |                   | Fruit should be black to reddish-black |       |                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| purple           |                   | Fruit should be reddish                |       |                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Strawberries     | March to November | Bright-red                             | — —   | Crisp but tender<br>Juicy, aromatic, and flavorful                             | Pick fruit with cap and portion of the stem attached<br>Capped fruit deteriorates rapidly—cool as soon as possible                                                          |