



Over the Garden Fence

Winter Orchard Care



By Bob Labozetta (UC Master Gardener, Mariposa)

With the colder weather coming on, experienced home gardeners realize orchard chores don't hibernate like our local bears. They just change.

Now is the time for mowing and cleaning up around your trees. Mow or rake fallen fruit to curtail pest problems. Mow tall weeds around trees to diminish rodent pressures and deer rubbing. Protect trees from mice and voles. Create or maintain at least 3 feet of clear space from around the base of each tree to help minimize rodents from girdling or feeding on bark and roots. Consider installing a physical barrier around the trunk and down into the soil up to 6 inches. Leave non-diseased leaf litter on the ground to provide habitat for cocooning beneficial insects. Remember, though, to keep the litter at least 3 feet from the base of tree trunks.

Paint the trunks of young fruit trees with a 1-to-1 mix of white (or light colored) indoor latex paint and water from the base of the tree to scaffold limbs, to avert sunscald.

Watch the weather forecast. Irrigate before the ground freezes. Keep roots moist but not waterlogged. Except for citrus, you generally want to avoid fertilizing during the winter months.

Now is the time to protect your trees for the coming year. Remove trees suffering from significant insect, disease or other problems. Treat with a dormant oil or dormant spray according to the manufacturer's directions.

Some fruit trees have specific needs. If you have apple and pear trees, inspect the trees for fire blight cankers. Prune out infected shoots when you conduct your late winter pruning and thin 15-20% of the last year's growth to keep tree open. Affected shoots and branches should be removed 10-12 inches below any visibly diseased tissue. Spray dormant oil just before bud break to control scale, mites, and aphids. For scab and blister, use lime sulfur.

Peaches and nectarines should be pruned to remove about ½ of last year's growth. Spray with dormant oil just before bud break to control scale and mites. For peach leaf curl, spray a copper fungicide twice (around Thanksgiving and again around Valentine's Day).

Cherry trees should be pruned to remove 10% of last year's growth. Use a dormant oil just before bud break to control scale or mites.

Taking the time to care for your backyard orchard during the winter will help to reduce pest and disease problems in the coming year. An added advantage of treating fruit trees in the dormant season is that it does not affect native pollinators.

UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County serve Mariposa County, including Coulterville, Greeley Hill and Don Pedro. For gardening and event information, call us at 209-966-7078 or email mgmariposa@ucdavis.edu. Find us online at http://cemariopsa.ucanr.edu/Master_Gardener/, on Facebook (UC Master Gardeners of Mariposa County), and on YouTube at "UCCE Mariposa". Listen to us on KRYZ 98.5 FM radio Wednesdays at 2pm and Saturdays at 5pm.