

Fruit Trees: Thinning Young Fruit

Fruit trees often set more fruit than they can support or develop adequately. Excessive fruit compete with each other for food and remain small. Leaving too much fruit on a tree can also lead to limb breakage.

The main benefit of thinning is for the fruit to receive more sunlight, so fruit color and flavor will be improved. This allows for the fruit to develop to its maximum size.

All stone fruit (peaches, apricots, nectarines, cherries and plums) require thinning. All apples, pears and Asian pears also need thinning. Fruit should be thinned when they are fairly small- typically April to mid-May.

Thin the fruit so that there is 2-5 inches between each fruit. Use your fist as an easy guide for spacing.

There are 2 main ways to thin fruits: by hand or by pole. Thinning by hand is more thorough but pole thinning is faster.

Hand thinning involves removing enough fruit to leave the remaining fruit with sufficient space so they do not touch at maturity. Use your fist as a spacing tool and remove the excess fruit. Remove "doubles" (two fruit fused together) and small, disfigured or damaged fruit.

Pole thinning is used mainly on large trees where hand thinning would be impractical. Pole thinning is much faster and although it is less accurate, the results are often acceptable. Strike individual fruit or clusters with a pole to remove fruit.

My peach tree has no fruit this year, what is wrong?

Many fruit and nut trees in the area are low on fruit production this year. During bloom, we had frost. The frost killed many of the flowers. Also, it was not warm enough for the bees to pollinate the flowers. Bees don't fly until 55 degrees. If the entire day is below 55 degrees then pollination does not happen.

For more gardening information go to cecolusa.ucanr.edu