

October Tips

FRUIT AND NUTS

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- Smaller apples usually keep longer and bruise less. Allow for air circulation when storing.
- Prepare your soil now for planting raspberries in the spring. A pH of 5.8 to 6.5 and sandy-loam soil are best for raspberries. When planting in a garden, avoid areas where tomatoes, eggplants, or potatoes were planted to guard against Verticillium wilt being in the soil.
- Nut trees are a fine addition to a large yard. They provide framing and background for the house, shade in the summer, food for wildlife, and a source of homegrown nuts.
- Although most nut-producing trees grow tall and need plenty of room to expand, filberts (also called hazelnuts) are the exception. Without pruning, they grow into large, suckering shrubs useful as an edible hedge. Alternatively, trim them into small landscape trees 15 to 25 feet tall.
- You can reduce the number of pests on fruit trees next year by picking up and destroying all fallen fruit, branches, and leaves. Worms and other pests feed on this fruit, overwinter in the soil, and emerge in the spring to lay eggs and start the cycle all over again.
- Many of the late-maturing apple varieties, such as Winesap, Yellow Newton, Rome Beauty, and Northern Spy, are best for storage. They can be stored outdoors in insulated boxes, straw-lined pits, or buried containers. As long as outdoor temperatures are above 10°F, they should not freeze. They will, however, last longer and taste better if kept in plastic bags or in plastic-lined, cardboard boxes in a fruit cellar. Cardboard boxes and plastic bags must be perforated to allow for air circulation.
- Most peats are grown on the West Coast, so to avoid bruising in transit, they have to be shipped before they are ripe. Those hard pears will become soft and juicy simply by putting the fruits in a paper bag or a basket on top of the refrigerator or other warm place for four to six days. The fruits will not ripen to a satisfactory quality if they are kept in a plastic bag or in the refrigerator.
- Strawberries covered in the fall with a spun-bonded polyester material and uncovered in the spring just before bloom produced up to 60 percent more fruit than plants given the conventional straw or hay mulch cover, reports Dr. James Pollard of the University of New Hampshire .

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- Surround the trunks of fruit trees with hardware cloth or similar wire, and bury the edges in the ground to prevent rodents from chewing on them.
- Clean up home orchard and small-fruit plantings. Sanitation is essential for good maintenance. Dried fruits or "mummies" carry disease organisms through the winter to attack next year's crop.
- Nut trees are a fine addition to the home landscape. They may accent the house, provide shade in the summer, and even become a good source of homegrown nuts.
- To beat birds, squirrels, and other pests to your crops, prompt harvesting is a must. This month harvest pecans, grapes, and pawpaws.
- A final weeding of your strawberries, blueberries, or raspberries will help keep weed problems down to a minimum. Start collecting fresh pine needles or clean straw to mulch strawberries after the ground has frozen.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dom, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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