



September Tips

FRUIT AND NUTS

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- As your apples ripen this fall, take time to walk through your orchard and observe your trees. Look for tell-tale signs of tree vigor, such as leaf color and shoot length, dead or dying trees, excessive crop load needing more thinning earlier in the season, and weed control among the trees. The problems you see can be remedied this fall or next spring.
- The small fruits offer definite advantages for home culture. They require a minimum of space for the amount of fruit produced and bear one or two years after planting. Also, pest control typically is easier than with most tree fruits.
- Be sure not to store apples or pears with vegetables such as potatoes and squash. The fruits give off ethylene gas that speeds up the ripening process of vegetables and may cause them to develop "off" flavors.
- Remove all 2-year-old canes from raspberry and blackberry plants to reduce overwintering of disease. Soil-applied fertilizers containing potassium, phosphorus, magnesium, or calcium can be applied, but do not cultivate or irrigate at this time of the year.
- Deer feeding on young apple trees can be significantly reduced by hanging bars of soap (Lifebuoy TM brand) in the trees to be protected. Virginia Tech researchers hope to isolate the repellent component of the soap in order to develop an effective sprayable product. In the meantime, this research lends credence to the popular folk method of repelling deer with soap.
- Need a pollinator for your apple tree, but don't have lots of room, or need more apples? Try a crabapple instead of a regular apple. Select a variety that blooms at the same time as your fruiting tree and has white flowers. Bees are not as interested in those with other flower colors.
- Harvesting guidelines: Pears should be picked at the hard ripe stage and allowed to finish ripening off the tree. The base color of yellow pears should change from green to yellow as the fruit approaches maturity.
- Check grapevines for mummified berries - victims of black rot. Pick them, and dispose of them before they can spread the disease. Do not put them in the compost pile.
- Fall weed control around fruit trees is crucial because weeds act as hosts to overwintering insects. Be sure to turn the soil as the days grow cooler to destroy soil-burrowing larvae.
- Be sure to keep strawberry fields weed free. Every weed you pull now will help make weeding much easier next spring.

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- There are several methods that can be used to determine when apples are ready to be picked. The first is to hold a fruit gently in the palm of your hand. Then, slowly lift up on the fruit. If the stem easily separates from the tree, it is ripe. Second, the base color, the side of the fruit nearest the trunk, of many varieties changes from a darker to a lighter shade of green as the fruit reaches maturity. A third test is to cut a fruit in half to check the color of its seeds. Brown seeds indicate ripeness or maturity.
- Harvest fall-bearing and/or ever bearing raspberries as soon as they ripen. Frequent harvesting helps to reduce insect and disease problems. Immediately after harvest, prune out canes or portions of canes on ever bearers that have borne fruit.

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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