

# FALL AND WINTER CARE OF DECIDUOUS FRUIT TREES

By Tom Del Hotal

As the weather changes to herald the beginning of fall, we must also change the cultural practices for our deciduous fruit trees. The following outline will help you to schedule tasks that will maximize tree health and spring fruit production. Timing each year will vary depending on the weather and this outline is intended to be modified according to the weather conditions.

## End of Summer - Early Fall

(Mid September - Early October)

- \* Reduce watering frequency to an average of one time every one or two weeks. Expand the watering area to cover the growing feeder root zone of the tree (at and beyond the drip line of the tree).
- \* Fertilize with low nitrogen, high phosphorous and high potassium fertilizer such as a 6-20-20 or 2-10-10, or 4-9-5 to enhance fall root development, spring flowering and fruiting and disease resistance.

## Winter

(November -December)

- \* Apply gypsum or gypsum product, compost and mulch to the feeder root zone to help leach out excess salts from the soil, add nutrients and humus lower the soil pH and help reduce weeds.

(Mid December - January)

- \* Reduce watering frequency as the trees enter dormancy. Water an average of one time every two to four weeks. Remember, winter rains do not generally replace irrigation!

- \* Prune fruit trees for structural strength, tree health, fruit production and size.

- \* Dormant spray fruit trees with fungicide and dormant oil to control dormant fruit tree diseases and overwintering insects. Spray trees two to three times, approximately two weeks apart. Do not spray apricots or apricot hybrids with lime sulphur or calcium polysulphide products!

## Early Spring

(February - April)

- \* Fertilize trees with a complete balanced fertilizer and increase the watering frequency as the trees break dormancy and the weather begins to get warmer and drier. Average watering frequency during this time of year should be one time every one or two weeks. During wet years, water *one* time every' three weeks.

- \* Apply copper banding to tree trunks or apply snail control products to prevent garden snail damage to new growth and developing fruit.

- \* Thin fruit after fruit set when the fruit is about 1/2 inch in size, to increase fruit size and to reduce the risk of limb breakage.