



August Tips

FRUIT AND NUTS

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- In late summer (around the end of August), tip layer the canes of black and red raspberries by pressing branch tips 3 to 4 inches into soil where branch tips naturally fall. A good root system will form on the tip by fall, to be dug and severed from the mother plant in early spring.
- If the birds get more of your berries, cherries, and raspberries than you do, try some yellow varieties. Birds think the yellow fruits are not ripe and don't eat as many.
- If your apples are lumpy, they may have apple maggots. Be sure fruit is not left lying on the ground because the apple maggots live in the fallen apples, and then pupate in the soil.
- Next year's strawberries may be the furthest thing from your mind now, but this is a critical time for the crop. It's in August and September that the cell size of the spring fruit buds is determined. The more favorable the growing conditions now, the bigger the cells this fall, which means bigger berries in the spring. But just a week without water can stress the plants. A University of Missouri study showed that it took only two September irrigations to increase yields in the spring by more than SOOO quarts per acre.
- Don't neglect plantings of strawberries, blueberries, and bramble fruits just because the fruit has been harvested. These plants are forming buds for next year's crop. Prevent water stress now to prevent buds from shriveling.
- Heavy rains at harvest can dilute the sugars in melons. Watermelons can reconcentrate sugar if left on the vine for a few dry days, but cantaloupes don't do this.
- Harvest cantaloupes when the melons pull easily from the stem; honeydews when the blossom end is slightly soft or springy; watermelons when there is a hollow sound when thumped and the skin loses its shine. Also, run your hand around the middle of the watermelon. When fully ripe, most varieties develop low, longitudinal ridges, rather like flexed calf muscles.
- August is harvest time for thornless blackberries. These berries are much larger than wild blackberries, but not as sweet, so remember to adjust the sugar in your recipes.
- Apples and pears trained as cordons, espalier, and other formal shapes can be summer pruned in early August.

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- Fertilize your strawberries in August. On plants set out this spring, apply 4 to 6 ounces of ammonium nitrate (33 percent actual nitrogen) or 12 to 18 ounces of 10-10-10 per 25 feet of row. Spread the fertilizer uniformly in a band 14 inches wide over the row when the foliage (not the ground) is dry. Brush fertilizer off the leaves to avoid leaf burn. For plants in the second year of growth, increase the application rate to 6 to 8 ounces ammonium nitrate or 18 to 24 ounces of 10-10-10 per 25 feet of row.
- Prop up branches of fruit trees that are threatening to break under increasing weight of ripening fruit.
- If your apple or pear trees have dead branches with leaves still clinging to the twigs, they may have fire blight. This bacterium is best controlled by pruning. When making cuts, prune at least 8 inches below the dead part of the twig and dip shears in a 10 percent bleach solution between cuts to prevent transmitting the disease to healthy wood. Also avoid excessive fertilizing with nitrogen in the spring as succulent new wood is more susceptible to fire blight bacteria.
- To determine if an apple is ready to pick, hold it up and give it a twist. If it resists, let it ripen a few more days.
- To reduce the number of pests on your fruit tree for the coming year, pick up and destroy all fallen fruit. Worms hide in the fallen fruit, and then pupate in the soil. They will be ready to lay eggs the next year.

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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