



# THE LIFE OF THE FRUIT TREE IN YOUR YARD, BLOOM TO HARVEST

By Birgitt Evans and Marla Koss, May 15, 2018

## STONE FRUIT (Plums, Peaches, Apricots, Cherries, Nectarines & Interspecifics)

Fruit	Bloom Time	Harvest Time	Days to Maturity
Plum	Feb—Early March	June—Sept	140–170
Cherry	Feb—Early March	May—June	100
Apricot	Early Feb—Early March	May—Sept	100–120
Peach	March—April	Mid-June—Sept	90–150
Nectarine	March—April	July—Sept	120–150

Stone Fruit in general need moderate amounts of water; those cultivars on Citation rootstock are sensitive to drought. Fertilize young trees in March and again in May; use higher-nitrogen food to help establish the tree. Fertilize established trees in May using a balanced fruit tree food. Peaches and Nectarines should only be fertilized once the threat of Leaf Curl is past. Check new foliage for curling before feeding.

Stone fruit have many challenges, but in Alameda Oak Root Fungus and Leaf Curl are major impediments to raising healthy trees.

“June Drop” helps plum trees regulate their crop size. Any excess remaining plums may be either plucked off (if in reach) or gently knocked off by use of a long, padded pole that can reach fruit clusters. Peaches and Nectarines must be hand-culled for optimal performance, leaving 5 to 7 inches of space between each fruitlet.

Prune Plums, Peaches, Nectarines and Interspecifics in winter for shape and in early summer for branch length and height. Prune Apricots and Cherries only in July or August, which in Alameda have the least chance of rainfall. Pruning these in the rainy season can cause the serious bacterial disease Eutypa Dieback.

## CITRUS (Lemons, Limes, Grapefruit, Oranges, Mandarins & Tangerines)

A Citrus tree normally blooms from late winter to early spring, though Meyer Lemons may bloom any time of the year. Most Citrus varieties have a second bloom either in summer or fall. Fruit can take up to a year to mature; generally fruits mature from January to May. You can have both mature fruit and flowers on a tree at the same time.

Sufficient water is critical to the production of high-quality fruit (fruit may even begin dropping from lack of water). Citrus are shallow-rooted. Water near the drip line of the tree; keep the trunk dry. A Citrus tree may need irrigation every 7 to 14 days during hot, dry summer conditions. Be sure to allow the soil around your Citrus tree to partially dry out between watering to prevent fungal diseases. Fertilize Citrus 3 or 4 times a year, depending on its needs. The easiest way to remember a good feeding schedule is Valentine's Day, Memorial Day and Labor Day. Citrus fertilizer contains N-P-K (macronutrients) plus the minerals (micronutrients) Iron, Manganese and Zinc to prevent deficiencies.

Pests of Alameda Citrus trees include rats, birds and squirrels; whiteflies; aphids, scale and the ants that tend and protect them; and snails. **WARNING: BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR THE ASIAN CITRUS PSYLLID,** which is moving up from Southern California and last year was finally identified in Alameda County. The Asian Citrus Pysllid is a vector for the bacterium Candidatus Liberibactor Asiaticus, which causes the lethal Citrus disease Huanglongbing, or HLB. **CALL 1-800-491-1899 IF YOU SPOT IT.**

## **AVOCADOS *Persea spp.***

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Originated in Southern Mexico. There are several species. They do well in mild-winter areas and can grow to be huge trees. Select smaller cultivars such as Wurtz, aka “Little 'Cado”

Avocado trees can grow in shade but need sun to produce fruit. They are evergreens with a major leaf shed in the spring and a minor one in the fall.

Avocado flowers appear in April to May; flowers are perfect, i.e., A and B types. A types receive pollen in the morning and B types receive pollen in the afternoon. Fruit production is better with two trees—one of each type—but is not strictly necessary. Fruit can take up to a year to mature. Avocados are hard when harvested but soften off the tree.

Keep the soil under an Avocado tree moist, but not over wet. Wet soil will cause root rot, which is the most common cause of tree death. Deep water when the soil dries out.

Fertilize 4 times a year. Nitrogen is best applied in late spring when the trees are dropping old leaves and growing new ones. Use a balanced fertilizer formulated for Citrus & Avocados. Yellowed leaves indicate an iron deficiency. Trees can also suffer from zinc deficiency.

Rats and squirrels will eat mature fruit. Squirrels will eat the seeds from small, first-year fruits. Watch for signs of Root Rot (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*), a soil borne disease.

## **FIGS *Ficus Carica***

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Figs are indigenous to western Asia and produce the best fruit in Mediterranean climates. Fig trees typically grow to 20 to 30 feet tall. Twigs are pithy rather than woody. Fig sap contains latex.

Figs form just above each leaf node. Flowers are clustered inside the green fruits and are all female, so no pollination is necessary. Many varieties produce a 'Breba' crop in June; the main crop is produced on new growth and ripens from late August to November, depending on the cultivar. Figs must ripen on the tree.

Water young Fig trees regularly. Drought-stressed trees will “runt out” and die. Deep-water mature trees every 1 to 2 weeks. Figs are moderate water users; drought-stressed trees will not produce fruit and are susceptible to nematode damage in the soil.

Fertilize when the tree leafs out in spring, and again in July. Apply nitrogen sparingly, at most 1 to 2 lbs. for a mature tree. Excess nitrogen causes excess growth at the expense of fruit. Figs in containers require regular, balanced fertilizer (consult fertilizer package directions for amount and frequency of use).

Figs are susceptible to Root Knot Nematodes, especially in sandy soil. Fig Mosaic Virus causes yellow mottling and is transmitted by Euryphid mites. Gophers love to eat fig roots; if you have a gopher problem in your neighborhood, line the planting hole with a gopher wire basket before planting your fig tree in the ground, or grow a smaller cultivar in a container. Osborne Prolific and Violette de Bordeaux are both smaller trees suitable for container growing. Birds and squirrels love the fruit; plant lighter varieties to outwit them.

## **POME FRUIT (Apples, Pears, Asian Pears, Quinces & Loquats)**

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Fruit	Bloom Time	Harvest Time	Days to Maturity
Apples	March—April	July—Nov	100–200
Pears	April	July—Oct	115–165
Asian Pears	April	July—Sept	90–150
Quinces	March	Sept—Oct	180–210
Loquat	Dec—Feb	March—June	90

Pome fruits require moderate water. Young trees require 5 to 10 gallons a week, applied every 1 to 2 weeks. Mature trees need deep watering every 2 to 3 weeks, depending on the weather conditions. Always water mature trees to the dripline. Apply a balanced fertilizer in March, May and July, spreading it out under the entire tree canopy, not at the trunk. Water the fertilizer in immediately. If you see a lot of leggy new growth, cut back on the nitrogen in your feeding schedule.

The most bothersome pests of Pome Fruits in Alameda are Coddling Moth and Woolly Apple Aphids. There are several methods to combat the several generations of Coddling Moths that are born each summer:

- 1) nylon bags placed over the apples by hand;
- 2) Use of the Kaolin Clay spray-on barrier product "Surround";
- 3) proper culling of fruit so that there are only one or two fruits per cluster—and no places for Coddling Moth larvae to crawl up into and get comfy.

The most serious disease that can harm any member of the Pome Fruit family is Fire Blight, which must be cut out using sterilized pruning equipment as soon as it's spotted in spring at blossom time. Powdery mildew, while less dangerous to the life of the tree, can sap a tree's energy by ruining foliage and cutting back on the tree's ability to photosynthesize.

### **PERSIMMONS (*Diospyros kaki*)**

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Non-astringent Persimmons of the round, flat, eat-when-crunchy type that grow well in Alameda include Fuyu and Izu as well as the yummy sounding "Coffee Cake" (Nishimura Wase), Giant Fuyu and others. The chief astringent variety grown in Alameda is the acorn-shaped Hachiya, but a "Chocolate" variety is also available. California Rare Fruit Growers' list of Persimmon cultivars is exhaustive and fun to look through.

In Alameda, Fuyu-type persimmons leaf out in mid-March to mid-April and blossom from mid-April to mid-May. Hachiya-types blossom in June. Persimmon blossoms are insignificant, and if conditions aren't right can drop as soon as tiny fruits begin forming. Young persimmon trees have a habit of shedding much of their fruit to save energy for growth. Fuyu-type Persimmons are ready for harvest between September (as leaves are turning color) and early November (after most of the canopy has shed). Hachiya-types ripen later and can stay on the tree until after leaf-fall (up to mid-December).

Deep-water established Persimmon trees out to the dripline every one or two weeks, depending on heat or very dry weather. Young tree need watering as soon as the top two inches of soil are dry.

Established trees will drop fruits that are at any stage of forming if nitrogen has been fed to the tree once bloom time has arrived; nitrogen should only be fed in early spring as leafing-out begins; year-round compost is a good alternative.

Persimmon trees suffer from few pests or diseases in Alameda. Whiteflies can be a problem in the years that they are swarming. Pill bugs or earwigs occasionally nestle beneath the calyxes of the fruit, but don't spoil it for human consumption. Birds, Squirrels, Rats, Opossums and Raccoons love the fruit and seem to know exactly when a piece of fruit is ripe enough to bite into. Propping up the branches of a loaded (or even half-loaded) Persimmon tree is a good idea not just because of the crop load, but because come midnight there may be a sizable varmint climbing around in it.