

FRUIT THINNING
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1. BENEFITS OF THINNING FRUIT

A. Fruit

1. larger and more uniform in size
2. better shaped
3. better color
4. more flavorful
5. less likely to fall before ripe
6. larger crop of usable fruit

B. Trees

1. healthier
 - a. not weakened by bearing too many fruit
 - b. less chance of limb breakage
 - c. likely to live longer
2. more likely to:
 - a. bear fruit every year, or
 - b. produce an equal crop every year (helps prevent the problem of alternating heavy and sparse crops)
 - c. hang on to crop until fruit ripe

2. WHICH FRUITS SHOULD BE THINNED?

A. The tree fruits most benefited by thinning are the “large-type” tree fruits - apples, pears, peaches, nectarines, apricots, and large plums

B. The quality and annual bearing of small tree fruits (crab apples, small plums, cherries, etc.) can usually be maintained by annual pruning alone; therefore, these fruits are usually not thinned

3. WHEN TO THIN

A. The sooner after flowering that the excess fruit is removed, the more the remaining fruit will improve in size and quality

B. By thinning early, growth is directed into those fruits which were left on the tree

C. Specific times to thin:

1. at blossom time
2. when fruit is between pea and marble size (1-2 weeks after bloom)
3. after first drop of little marble-sized fruits (a few weeks after bloom); and so-called “June drop”

4. HOW MUCH TO THIN

A. When fruit set is heavy, you may have to pick up to 80-90% of the fruit off the tree

(and throw it away!) at the time you thin

- B. Pick off all fruit that is deformed, diseased, or that have been attacked by insects
- C. To get proper spacing and annual crops on apples it is necessary to remove all fruit or blossoms from as many as one third to one half of all fruit spurs
- D. Leave only one fruit in a cluster
- E. Balance fruit on opposite sides of limb
- F. Spacing of fruit left on trees
 - 1. larger fruit (apples, pears, peaches, and nectarines) should be spaced at least 6"-8" apart and may be spaced as much as 10"-12" apart
 - a. apples thinned to 10"-12" apart produce a commercial size fruit
 - b. apples thinned to 10"-12" apart produce a convenient snack size fruit
 - 2. smaller fruit (apricots and plums) should be spaced 4"-6" apart

Note: A good general rule is to thin fruit to a distance twice as far apart as the diameter you want the fruit to be at maturity

- G. Thin fruit to the wider spacings suggested
 - 1. on young, weak, or sparsely leafed trees
 - 2. in a year with a very heavy fruit set

5. METHODS OF THINNING

- A. Hand thinning
 - 1. twist fruit off stem
 - 2. If twisting fruit off causes adjacent fruit to break off, clip stems with small scissors
- B. Pole with padded tip if you have large or many trees
 - 1. tap along each branch to jar excess fruit loose
 - 2. works best on marble size fruits, except for apples
 - 3. if possible, finish job by hand, especially on weaker and lower branches
- C. Chemical spraying at blossom time if commercial orchard or large number of trees

6. Home fruit growers rarely have enough "COURAGE" to remove as much fruit as necessary to get the best results - SO EXPERIMENT!!! Space differently on various branches and at harvest time compare fruit size and flavor of the different spacings.