



PHILADELPHIA ORCHARD PROJECT

ECOLOGICAL ORCHARD CARE BY SEASON

Below is a summary of some of the most essential eco-orchard tasks by season. This is not a comprehensive list or a how-to-guide. Attending workshops and acquiring additional reference materials is strongly advised!

WINTER

PRUNING. For best production and tree health, all common fruit trees regardless of age should be pruned during their dormant season every winter, ideally between late January and early March. The basic idea is to open the tree to more air and light. See POP's pruning guide for more information (phillyorchards.org/orchards/permaculture).

REMOVE MUMMIFIED FRUIT. Any fruit left hanging on the tree is a potential source for disease spores. Pluck and remove any mummified fruit from the orchard during pruning.

MAINTAIN ORCHARD EQUIPMENT. Clean and sharpen all orchard tools. Order orchard care supplies.

SPRING

APPLY MULCH/COMPOST. Spread chipped winter prunings, shredded leaves or compost.

HOLISTIC ORCHARD SPRAYS. Holistic sprays are composed of compost tea, liquid fish/seaweed, neem oil, and/or effective microbes. For best tree health and resistant to disease, apply up to 4 times in the spring (after bud break, at first pink of flowers, after petal fall, and two weeks after petal fall). Depending on specific pest or disease problems, some orchardists might also consider other organic sprays including kaolin clay, sulfur fungicides, Bt, spinosad, etc.

TRAINING. New growth can be trained to better angles using clothes pins, branch spreaders, or tying to weights.

THINNING. In late May or early June, young fruitlets on peaches, apples, pears and Asian pears, and some plums should be thinned by pinching off with fingers or pruner. Peaches should be thinned to 8" apart, apples and pears to 5", and heavy-bearing plums to 5" on the tree. Also at this time, all fruit should be removed from any newly planted trees.

SUMMER

HARVEST. Pick fruit as they ripen, spring through fall according to fruit type. Remove or compost any fallen fruit to reduce potential pests and disease.

MONITOR. Observe orchard for pest and disease problems and respond appropriately with trapping, removal, or possible applications of kaolin clay, neem oil, Bt, spinosad, etc.

PRUNING. Remove diseased or damaged wood, root suckers, and watersprouts any time of year. Be sure to sterilize tools with alcohol or bleach solution between each cut. In some cases, additional structural pruning may be done in early summer to minimize regrowth, but avoid anything but emergency pruning after July.

FALL

APPLY COMPOST. After most leaves have fallen, spread a layer of compost or spray compost tea. An annual soil test can reveal any other specific nutrients or amendments that should be added.

RECOMMENDED READING:

The Holistic Orchard, Michael Phillips

Grow Fruit Naturally, Lee Reich

The Organic Gardener's Handbook of Natural Insect and Disease Control, Ellis and Bradley