

Cherries: Calendar of Operations for Home Gardeners

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Cherry trees are best suited to moderate climate regions in California, and most varieties require at least 600 hours of winter chilling (below 45°F) for normal flowering and consistent production. High summer temperatures contribute to fruit deformities such as doubling or spurring of the fruit, although some varieties are more tolerant of high temperatures. In foggy or very cool climates, fruit disease problems make production of quality fruit difficult. Generally speaking, sour cherries are more likely than sweet cherries to produce good-quality fruit in the warmer climate zones of California.

Cherries need well-drained soil because they are quite prone to root and crown rots, especially in heavier-textured soils. They generally do not do well when planted in lawns: frequent irrigations promote root diseases to which cherries are susceptible. Many cherries are not self-fruitful and so require a pollinizer to ensure a good crop. A second compatible variety has to be planted nearby or grafted onto one major limb of the cherry tree.

Winter Dormant Season

1. If scale insects, aphids, or mites are recurring problems, apply dormant oil sprays (follow label instructions) to help control these pests.
2. Prune out about 10 percent of last year's growth on mature trees to let light into the tree. Remove broken and diseased branches.
3. Cherry trees sunburn easily. In hot regions, apply a 1:1 mixture of white interior latex paint and water for protection from sunburn and subsequent borer infestation. Apply the paint mixture from two inches below the soil surface up the entire trunk and on southwest-exposed scaffold branches.
4. Plant new trees during the dormant season in areas that have good soil texture and good drainage. Avoid planting in heavy or compacted soils.

Spring Bloom Season

1. You may need to apply fungicide to control brown rot. Apply bordeaux or fixed copper at the *popcorn* stage of bud development (when the unopened flower buds have matured and the petal color is discernible, so they resemble partially popped corn kernels). Apply again at the full-bloom stage, following label instructions.
2. Keep the trunk and the soil at the base of the tree dry during irrigation. Apply water out toward the drip line to reduce crown rot problems.

Spring Harvest Season

1. If you use drip irrigation, apply just the amount of water needed to replace what is used by the tree and lost from the soil through evaporation. If you use sprinkler or flood irrigation, water about every two to three weeks and provide enough water to wet the soil to a depth of 18 to 24 inches. During summer, young, small trees will need about 4 to 12 gallons of water per day, and large trees up to 250 gallons per week, although water requirements will vary depending on environmental conditions and your soil type.
2. Cover trees with netting to protect the fruit from birds.
3. Harvest cherries when fully ripe, and avoid damaging the fruit spurs as the fruit is picked. Keep the stems attached to the cherries to keep tearing of the flesh to a minimum. Cherries may be stored for several days under refrigeration. They may be sun-dried, canned, or frozen for longer storage.
4. Apply nitrogen fertilizer after harvest. Water the fertilizer in immediately to avoid loss of nitrogen. For mature trees, use about 4 pounds of ammonium sulfate annually.

Summer and Autumn

1. Continue regular irrigation until fall rains and cold weather arrive.
2. Avoid excessive cultivation around the tree as it may damage shallow roots and expose them to disease organisms.



For More Information

Consult these UC IPM Pest Notes online at <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu>:

Aphids
Bordeaux Mixture
Scales
Spider Mites

You'll also find detailed information on many aspects of fruit and nut tree care in these titles and in other publications, slides sets, and videos from UC ANR:

California Master Gardener Handbook, publication 3382
Drip Irrigation in the Home Landscape, publication 21579
Pests of the Garden and Small Farm, publication 3332
Pruning Fruit and Nut Trees, publication 21171
Sweet Cherries for the Home Grounds, publication 2951
The UC Guide to Solving Garden and Landscape Problems, CD-ROM 3400

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Publication 7260

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pr-1/02-JWC/CY



This publication has been anonymously peer reviewed for technical accuracy by University of California scientists and other qualified professionals. This review process was managed by the ANR Associate Editor for Pomology, Viticulture, and Subtropical Horticulture.

WARNING ON THE USE OF CHEMICALS

Carefully follow all precautions and safety recommendations given on the container label. Store all chemicals in their original labeled containers in a locked cabinet or shed, away from foods or feeds, and out of the reach of children, unauthorized persons, pets, and livestock.

Confine chemicals to the property being treated. Avoid drift onto neighboring properties, especially gardens containing fruits and/or vegetables ready to be picked.

Mix and apply only the amount of pesticide you will need to complete the application. spray all the material according to label directions. Do not dispose of unused material by pouring down the drain or toilet. Do not pour on ground: soil or underground water supplies may be contaminated. follow label directions for disposing of container. Never burn pesticide containers.

PHYTOTOXICITY: Certain chemicals may cause plant injury if used at the wrong stage of plant development or when temperatures are too high. Injury may also result from excessive amounts or the wrong formulation or from mixing incompatible materials. Inert ingredients, such as wetters, spreaders, emulsifiers, diluents, and solvents, can cause plant injury. Since formulations are often changed by manufacturers, it is possible that plant injury may occur, even though no injury was noted in previous seasons.

Funding for this publication was made possible through a grant from the Elvenia J. Slosson Fund.