



Why Does My Fruit Tree Have No Fruit?

By Raymond Schoenwandt

UCCE Master Gardener of El Dorado County

“Give me juicy autumnal fruit, ripe and fresh from the orchard.” Walt Whitman

How many times have you or someone you know planted a fruit tree in anticipation of harvesting fresh fruit, only to be disappointed when your tree fails to produce? Unfortunately, this is a common and frustrating problem for many backyard fruit growers. So, for those of you whose trees fail to bloom or bear, here are the most common reasons why your trees do not bear fruit.

Age of your tree: depending on the type of tree, it can take from two to five years to produce fruit. For the purposes of determining when you should expect fruit, count the years from the month you planted the tree in the ground.

Climate and Weather: most fruit trees require a certain amount of cold weather (chill hours) to produce fruit. When winter temperatures are too mild, the tree may not get enough chill hours to allow the tree to break dormancy and flower. Late spring frosts, hail or heavy rain can also damage flowers on the tree. If the damage is severe, the tree will not produce fruit.

Over- fertilization: heavy application of fertilizer will stimulate excessive green growth, at the expense of flowers. If your fruit tree is planted in the middle or the edge of your lawn, or close to other ornamental plants, remember that whenever you apply fertilizer to these plants you are also fertilizing your fruit trees.

Pruning Practices: either not pruning your trees at the appropriate time of year, or over pruning your tree, can cause your trees to not produce fruit. In general, heading cuts (the removal of a portion of the branch) will stimulate more vegetative (leafy) growth and delay flowering. Extreme heading cuts can totally prevent flowering and therefore your tree will not produce any

fruit the following season. Thinning cuts (removing the branch back to the point where the branch grows out of the tree) will encourage more flower production. Pruning your tree with dull pruners which do not make clean cuts, or pruners that were not properly cleaned, will make your trees more susceptible to disease. Sick trees will either produce very little fruit or no fruit.

Poor Pollination: In order for trees to bear fruit the flowers of the tree must receive healthy pollen at the correct time. Since insect pollinators (such as bees) are the main method of transferring pollen, anything that interferes with their activity, such as rain, hail, wind, cold weather, or application of insecticides will reduce pollination. Some trees cannot produce fruit from their own pollen and require cross pollination from another variety of tree. Trees requiring cross pollination should be planted close to the trees that produce pollen that will allow the tree to produce fruit. In addition, the bloom periods (when the tree produces flowers with pollen) must overlap to allow for cross pollination. For example, if you have two different varieties of cherry trees that cross pollinate each other, but one tree blooms in April and the other tree blooms in May, you will not get any fruit from either tree. Finally, some trees such as Kiwi, Persimmons and Pistachios have male and female trees, while only the female trees will produce fruit; there must be at least one male tree for every five to eight female trees in order to get fruit.

Hopefully this will help you make better decisions on how to grow and care for your trees. Happy gardening to everyone!

There is no public education gardening class this Saturday, August 16, 2014. UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmers Markets or from Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, at the office located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville, or call 621-5512.

Master Gardeners are seeking your opinion on where, when, and what subjects should be taught at their free public education gardening classes. Help them understand how to best serve our community by filling out a brief online survey at <http://bit.ly/1qCsRIId>. Paper copies of the survey are also available at the Master Gardener office.

For more information about our free public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.