

Caring for low input fruit crops

A knowledge based on low input orchard or vineyard care system begins with careful planning.

One of the first things to do is look through catalogs and publications for tree fruit and grape varieties that do well in the Pacific Northwest by resisting common diseases. For example when planting a liberty or chehalis apple you will never need to spray fungicides to control apple scab because they are highly resistant. If you plant a frost peach you will never need to worry about peach leaf curl disease. Or if you plant Native American grapevine varieties like canadice, himrod or concord they will be very resistant to powdery mildew, a major disease of grapes. Just choosing disease resistant varieties can save you 3 to 4 sprays a year with all these types of fruit crops.

The next step when choosing trees is to select dwarfing rootstocks. Tree size can be maintained between 6 feet and 9 feet tall by using dwarf or semi-dwarf rootstocks. Smaller trees make it easier to develop an open form that will dry quickly after rains reducing incidence of disease. Small trees are also easier to work with when pruning, thinning, spraying,



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and picking, saving you time throughout the entire year. They require less spray, plus allow easy access to the upper tree canopy helping to keep sprays on target. Training and pruning your grapevines properly to maintain good air circulation will also make disease less likely.

Planting your fruit tree selections in a well drained fertile site that receives 8 or more hours of sunlight a day will lead to healthier trees that can resist disease and pests. When you are planning your orchard or vineyard site be aware of frost pockets that are low areas where frost settles on cold mornings. These can be very destructive to fruit set during spring bloom.

Insect pest control is getting easier for low input growers. We no longer need to spray every 10 days to keep an orchard free from damaging pests. Instead, we are able to monitor when specific insect pests arrive in the orchard by using pheromone lures placed in sticky traps that are hung in your fruit trees. Then when pests are present, we can apply sprays in a timely fashion. Gardeners are now able to

reduce the number of conventional pesticide sprays by up to 50 percent when controlling codling moth on apples and pears. Also, low toxicity products that target just the pests, not beneficial insects are making home fruit production safer. Research at the Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center (SOREC) near Medford is providing more helpful information for home orchardists. Pesticide trials to control orchard pests continue to find promising new ways to control pests that are safer for people and the environment.

To learn more about low input pest control systems for your home fruit production, visit the OSU Master Gardener Plant Clinic in the OSU Extension Service office in Roseburg.

To learn about the importance of pruning in a low input orchard, join our OSU Extension class Jan. 29. More information is available on the website events calendar at <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/douglas/>. A registration form can be found on the calendar event.

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