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Preventing Fruiting in Woody Plants

This NebGuide covers what to use to prevent fruiting or remove fruit from ornamental landscape trees and shrubs.

Donald H. Steinegger, Extension horticultureiculturist

The ideal shrub or tree for a home landscape is one that is aesthetically pleasing, architecturally suitable, and adapted to its site. Aesthetically, plants with season-long foliage and fall color are desirable. The landscape value of these plants increase if they also produce flowers and fruits.

Despite the increased value of a flowering plant, some people consider spent flowers and fruits undesirable litter, especially when they fall on driveways and sidewalks. Also, plants producing edible fruit and serving as landscape plants require more regular spraying to produce quality fruit than most people want to provide.

For these homeowners, there are several ways to remove fruit or prevent fruiting. One more time-consuming method is to hand-remove spent flowers or small fruit. This may not be practical for large trees or extensive plantings of shrubs. The most practical method for these is to use hormone-type foliar sprays.

There are limitations to the effectiveness of hormone-type sprays:

- Results vary with the species and cultivars (varieties) of a plant. For example, crabapple versus mulberry, or Dolgo Crab versus Sargent's Crab.
- Correct concentration is crucial. Too low of a concentration can increase fruit set. Too much may cause leaf and stem injury.
- Hormone effect is influenced by both weather conditions and time of application. *Be sure to follow label directions.* Based on reported results from Ohio,* the recommendations in *Table I* should remove 90 to 95 percent of the fruit. *Do not exceed recommended amounts.* Use the lower recommended concentration if you have sprayed with these materials during the same season.

Another method is to use the readily available insecticide Sevin which will reduce fruit numbers on crabapple. It is not as effective as the naphthaleneacetic acid type (NAA) hormone sprays, but is safer to use. A combination of Sevin and NAA would probably be the best choice, but recommended dosages of this combination are still being determined.

Caution: Do not spray with Sevin (alone or in combination) during bloom. This chemical is toxic to bees.

Sources**

Hormone-types

Napthaleneacetic acid types (NAA)
Trade names: Fruitone N, App-L-Set

Mann Enterprises, Inc.
1210 Normal Street
Woodbine, IA 51579
(712) 647-2520

Insecticide

Carbaryl
Trade name: Sevin

Sources:

Garden centers, hardware stores, and other local suppliers.

Table I. Recommended fruit control sprays ¹				
Species	Chemical	Concentration	Time to Spray	Comments
Apple, Crabapple (<i>Malus sp.</i>)	Fruitone N in 10 days.	40-60 ppm with crabapple. (1 T/gal)	Full bloom. Repeat.	Best results
	App-L-Set	40-60 ppm (1 1/4 T/gal)	Full bloom. May repeat in 10 days.	
	Sevin (50% WP)	3 lbs/100 gals (3 T/gal)	2-3 weeks <i>after</i> full bloom.	Not as effective as NAA. Toxic to bees.
	Sevin (50% WP) + Fruitone N	2 1/2-3 lbs/100 gals (2 1/2-3 T/gal)	Do not spray during bloom.	For trial only.
	Catalpa (<i>Catalpa speciosa</i>)	Fruitone N	40-60 ppm (1 T/gal)	Full bloom.
App-L-Set		40-60 ppm (1 1/4 T/gal)	Full bloom.	
Horse chestnut (<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>)	Fruitone N	40-60 ppm (1 T/gal)	Full bloom.	
	App-L-Set	40-60 ppm (1 1/4 T/gal)	Full bloom.	
Honey locust (<i>Gleditsi Triancanthus</i>)	Fruitone N	60-100 ppm (1-1 1/2 T/gal)	Apply when fruits are 1-2" long.	

<i>inermis</i>)	App-L-Set	60-100 ppm (1 1/2-2 T/gal)	Apply when fruits are 1-2" long.	
Ginkgo (<i>Ginkgo biloba</i>)	Maleic hydrazide	750 ppm (3 ml/gal)	Full bloom.	
Mulberry (<i>Morus sp.</i>)	Fruitone N	40-60 ppm (1 T/gal)	Full bloom.	
<p>*This information was adapted from the Ohio State University publication, <i>Removing Flowers and Fruits from Trees</i>. **Listing of trade names and suppliers does not imply an endorsement by Nebraska Cooperative Extension, but is only for the convenience of the reader. Other resources for these chemicals may be available.</p>				

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