

Horticulture



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Apricots in the Home Garden

Michael Caron, Extension Horticulturist, Thanksgiving Point

Taun Beddes, Extension Horticulturist, Utah County

Brent Black, Extension Fruit Specialist

Introduction

Apricots (*Prunus armeniaca*) originated in China, but can be grown in most of the western world including much of Utah. Like peaches, plums, and cherries, apricots have a large, hard pit or 'stone' in the fruit and are considered 'stone fruits'. They are beautiful in flower and are among the most ornamental of the tree fruits. Apricots are a versatile fruit that can be dried, made into fruit leather, frozen, canned/bottled, made into jam/jelly, or eaten fresh.

Species and Cultivars

Some common winter-hardy, later blooming cultivars include 'Chinese' ('Mormon'), 'Moorpark', 'Goldrich', 'Tilton' and 'Harglow'. Of these, 'Goldrich' and 'Harglow' are the latest blooming. Even though these cultivars are later blooming, they are still prone to spring freeze damage. All are good for eating fresh and general processing. The cultivar 'Royal Blenheim' is among the most popular apricots but is NOT recommended for Utah because it is not winter hardy and blooms very early.

General Information

Apricots are commonly grown in USDA Hardiness Zones 5 to 8. Many common cultivars can survive Zone 4, but produce fruit sporadically because of frost damage to blossoms. Because apricots bloom early, damage to blossoms by spring freezes may sometimes occur even in warmer zones. Selecting

cultivars that have long winter chilling requirements can potentially delay bloom and help reduce the risk of freeze damage. Manchurian (*Prunus armeniaca mandshurica*) and Siberian (*Prunus armeniaca siberica*) apricots can be grown in Zone 3. Fruit size is often smaller and of poorer quality than for other named cultivars. Some common Manchurian selections include 'Mandan', 'Sungold' and 'Moongold'. Siberian apricot is available in commerce but no common cultivars exist.

Apricots are generally self-fruitful, but most will produce better when another cultivar with similar bloom time is nearby for pollinizing. Most fruit is borne on short spurs on 1-year-old wood that remain productive for 3 to 5 years. Fruit is typically harvested July through August (cultivar dependent), when they turn yellow or develop a red blush and begin to soften. Trees typically over-bear and will produce many small, less-useable fruits unless fruit is thinned. When fruits are grape-sized, thin to one fruit every 4 to 6 inches along the branch to increase size of remaining fruit and to maintain tree health.

Plum-Apricot Hybrids: Plum and apricot readily cross pollinate and the resulting seeds will produce trees that are interspecific hybrids, with a wide range of these hybrids available in the marketplace. Plum-apricot hybrids range in genetic background and characteristics from predominantly plum to predominantly apricot, and are known in commercial trade as Plumcot, Pluot®, Aprium®, etc. (trademarks of Zaiger Genetics).

How to Grow

Soil Preparation: Apricots grow in most Utah soils as long as the soil has sufficient drainage. However, soil testing can help determine the appropriate amendments to add to a site before planting. Apply any deficient nutrients as indicated from soil tests and till into the soil. Visit the USU Analytical Laboratory for more information on soil testing: www.usual.usu.edu. Apricots, like peaches and plums, have little tolerance of wet and heavy soils and will easily get root-rotting diseases in such conditions, especially when irrigation is not carefully managed. Apricots are very prone to iron chlorosis in the alkaline soils of Utah. Overwatering will significantly increase the risk of chlorosis and general tree decline as a result. Deep, infrequent irrigation and use of EDDHA chelated iron may help considerably. For more information on iron chlorosis management see the USU [Iron Chlorosis in Berries](#) fact sheet.

Planting and Spacing: Trees should not be planted in lawns, because irrigation and fertilization needs for each are very different. Grass is usually watered more often than is ideal for trees. Grass also aggressively competes for nutrients such as nitrogen, and can slow the growth of fruit trees. The location should also be free of perennial weeds such as field bindweed and quackgrass.

Space trees 18 to 22 feet apart. For potted trees, prepare a hole for planting twice the width and the same depth as the container. Planting the tree at the same height as the rootball is important. If too shallow, the root ball will dry out. If too deep, lack of soil oxygen will cause root loss and trees will decline. For bare-root trees, prepare a hole slightly wider than the roots, and deep enough so that the root flare is just above the soil line and the graft is 2 to 4 inches above ground. Never allow the roots to dry out. Immediately after planting, water thoroughly to settle the soil and eliminate any air pockets around the roots. In windy areas, bare-root trees should be staked for 1 year. The stake should not remain for more than a year. For more specific information, see the YouTube video "[USU Extension - How to Plant Bare Root Trees.](#)"

Irrigation: During the first season, irrigate at an interval that will keep the soil moist but not soggy. Depending on rainfall and temperature, irrigate about two times per week to ensure establishment.

For the next few years, maintain a biweekly watering program that will apply around 30 inches of water over the season. This can be reduced if there is significant rainfall accumulation. Irrigation methods that apply water near the base of the tree, such as drip systems, soaker hoses, or hand watering, will keep the canopy dry and help prevent foliar disease.

Fertilization: There are no specific fertilizer recommendations for apricots grown in a home orchard. Newly planted apricots should not be fertilized in the first year they are transplanted. Young apricot trees should produce new shoots that average 10 to 20 inches in length each year. For older trees, growth slows to 8 to 10 inches of new growth per year. Fertilization is not needed if growth rates are adequate. The most common limiting nutrient is nitrogen, and when inadequate, trees will not produce sufficient new growth. If planted near a lawn or garden that is fertilized, trees will usually get plenty of nutrition from those areas. Many factors including irrigation, diseases, soil type, and pests affect plant performance. If any of these factors reduce vigor, fertilizer is not helpful. When trees are not growing satisfactorily, soil testing may be helpful in determining fertilization needs. It is important to understand that fertilizer is not a panacea that solves all plant problems. When nitrogen is needed, apply ½ to 1 cup 20-0-0 around the dripline of trees younger than 5 years old. If phosphorus and potassium are also deficient, apply a similar quantity of 16-16-16, or an equivalent balanced fertilizer. For older trees apply 1 to 2 cups.

Pruning: Prune/train apricot trees to an open vase system, similar to peaches. An open vase training system is done by selecting 3 to 4 branches that originate 18 to 24 inches above the ground that are evenly spaced around the tree to become the main "scaffold" branches. Remaining branches and the central stem are removed. Annual pruning on new and established trees is needed and should be done in late winter. Start by removing any dead, diseased, or damaged branches. For established trees, remove about 25% of the branches to allow light penetration, increase fruit quality, and encourage new branch development. Remember apricots produce fruit on spurs (short side shoots) up to 5 years old, so do not remove too much fruit-bearing wood. Remove suckers (shoots coming from the roots or stem below the graft) on a regular basis. A modified central leader system also works well,

particularly in Utah's hotter environments. A modified central leader results in more foliage in the middle of the tree, which in Utah's hotter climates reduces sunburn on the fruit and scaffold branches. For more information on training and pruning see the USU Extension Bulletin [Pruning the Home Orchard](#).



Example of an open vase training system. Photo: Michael Caron.

Harvest, Storage and Use

When ripe, fruit should be slightly soft and skin will change from green to yellow, red, orange, or combinations of these depending on cultivar. Yields of 3 to 4 bushels per tree may be expected, depending on cultivar. When harvesting, twist fruit slightly when pulling to avoid spur injury. Store slightly unripe apricots at room temperature until ripe. Ripe fruit can be refrigerated for 3-5 days. Apricots can be prepared and eaten using many methods including broiled, grilled, and poached. They can also be preserved by freezing, canning, or drying. For more information visit the USU [Preserve the Harvest –Apricots](#) factsheet.



Example of a modified central leader training system. Photo by Michael Pace.

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Problems. For current and specific pest and disease information please visit the UtahPests IPM Website (www.utahpests.usu.edu) and subscribe to the tree fruit updates.

Disease	Identification	Control
Coryneum Blight (Shot Hole)	Round, purple-tinted lesions on leaves turn black and centers fall out leaving many small holes in leaves. Similar lesions on fruit eventually turn black. Black cankers form on branches which will eventually die.	Prune out heavily infected branches. Clean up debris including leaves in fall. Timed fungicide sprays just after petal fall in spring and at 50% leaf drop in autumn. See also the USU Coryneum Blight Factsheet .
Cytospora/Pseudomonas Canker	Wounds/cankers that ooze or produce amber-colored gummy sap. Leaves may suddenly wilt due to the plugging of conductive tissue. Bark may have areas of dark discoloration.	Avoid tree injuries. Protect trunk and lower limbs from winter sun injury. Fruit thinning also prevents branch cracking, eliminating wounds open to infection. Prune out infected wood 1 foot below where last symptoms are seen as soon as symptoms appear. Fall pruning is not recommend for northern Utah conditions. Fungicides are not generally recommended for these diseases.
General Root Diseases	Yellowing leaves, general decline and lack of vigor. Branch dieback. Extremely common with newly planted trees due to unintentional overwatering.	Manage irrigation carefully based on soil type- most critical on heavy soils. Ensure good drainage, Avoid planting in turf. See also the USU Peach Irrigation fact sheet .

Insect		
Greater Peach Tree Borer	Clear wing moth species lays eggs on bark near the base of the tree. Borers are often present in the roots to lower limbs. Multiple generations per year.	Subscribe to USU Pest Lab updates for spray timing and registered products at www.utahpests.usu.edu/ipm . Prevention is the best approach- keep trees healthy and do not damage bark and roots.
Aphids	Multiple species infest trees. Early season leaf curl and deformation and stick leaves are signs of aphids or other sap feeding insects. Can occur throughout the growing season.	For minor to moderate infestations treat with an insecticidal soap, or summer weight horticultural oil or neem. Infestations rarely require stronger insecticides.
Spider Mites	Leaves develop a mottled or stippled, dusty appearance. Over time branch dieback is common. Webs may be observed as populations build. Especially common on trees excessively sprayed with a pyrethroid or carbaryl due to natural predators being killed.	For minor to moderate infestations treat with an insecticidal soap, or summer weight horticultural oil or neem. Infestations rarely require stronger insecticides.
San Jose Scale	Small insect with hard protective covering that infests branches and fruit. Colonies may look somewhat like bark ridges but develop a gray or black color late in the season. Usually two to three generations per year.	Apply a horticultural oil/carbaryl mix at the delayed dormant stage. Monitor infested branches for larval crawlers late spring to early summer using double sided tape. Most registered insecticides easily control crawlers. When spraying older protected insects use a surfactant or a spreader/sticker in combination with a registered insecticide.

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