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## Apricot, the Versatile Fruit

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## GARDEN NOTES

# APRICOT, THE VERSATILE FRUIT

*By Dennis Hinkamp*

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Spring-37

The good thing about apricot trees is they bloom early in the spring. The bad thing about apricot trees is they bloom early in the spring. While the early color is welcome, the chance of losing the fruit to later frosts in northern Utah is high.

“Apricots are one of those fruits where a little is good, but a lot is obnoxious,” says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. “With apricots it is usually feast or famine. If the blossoms escape being killed by a late frost, apricots start outnumbering zucchinis by late summer.”

Apricots are a fruit that anyone can grow, he says. The trees are versatile, graceful and beautiful. The foliage is attractive, and they make nice shade trees throughout the summer months. And, in the fall, as the tree prepares for the winter months, they have nice color. In addition to complementing the landscape, most people grow apricot trees for their fruit, which is also versatile. It can be eaten fresh, dried for storage, made into wonderful preserves or thrown at unsuspecting targets.

Apricots are self fruiting, meaning they do not require another tree for pollination, he says. Because of the timing when it blooms, late frosts often kill the fruit. Not a lot can be done to prevent a late frost. However, some people have tried to protect the tender flowers and fruit by covering their tree with a blanket and sticking a light under it to keep the future fruit from freezing. Although this can be effective, it is not practical for all trees.

Hot summers in northern Utah are another problem for apricots, he says. Although they can adapt, apricot trees prefer a milder climate with cooler summers. The heat can stress the trees leaving them a bit vulnerable to diseases and insects.

The only major insect problem with apricot trees is the peach tree borer, Goodspeed says. The adult lays eggs at the base of stone fruit trees. After they hatch, the larva bore into the tree right at the soil level. Protect apricots and any other stone fruit trees by applying a registered insecticide around the base of the tree by July 1. The tree needs to be protected for about two months.

Another problem that is common with this fruit tree is a disease called Coryneum Blight, or “shot-hole” disease, he says. The most noticeable symptoms of this disease are small brown

specks that appear on the fruit about harvest time. The fruit is still quite edible, just not as pretty. This disease can also cause cankers on the twigs and buds, and can contribute to that gummy substance exuding from the tree.

Controlling this fungal disease isn't always easy, he warns. A registered fungicide needs to be applied right after the flower petals fall off the tree. Reapply it in the fall, right after the leaves drop off the tree.

“Another maintenance task that is often neglected is thinning the fruit during those years when a late frost doesn't do it for us,” Goodspeed says. “This is hard for most people. They are afraid that if they remove any of the fruit it will reduce the amount they get. Actually, when the fruit is thinned, the remaining fruit is larger and sweeter, and the actual pounds of fruit harvested remains about the same. The time to thin is late May.”

Be sure to water apricot trees like most other trees -- deeply and infrequently, he adds. They are susceptible to root rot and iron chlorosis if they are over-watered or the trunk is surrounded by a deep wading pool of standing water. Fertilize these trees in the late winter.

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