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## Alternate bearing

Posted by [Zea Sonnabend](#)

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[Zea Sonnabend](#)

[Alternate bearing](#)

May 08, 2017 08:42AM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 58

We have been trying to correct the alternate bearing tendency that some varieties are prone to when they over crop, aren't pruned enough, or are neglected. We have been doing this by vigorous pruning, heavy thinning in the "on" year, and foliar sprays with humid and folic acids with seaweed and fish to try to build strength for next year's buds during the summer.

I am happy to report that after 3 years we can say it has been fairly successful on the Newtown Pippins and Empire. These are 40+ yr. old trees on standard roots. Both of these have a good fruit set this year in what should be the down year. It appears not to have worked so well on our Fujis, which don't have such a good crop.

I am wondering about other varieties that are notorious alternate bearers and if any of you have experience with getting them to even out?

[Fruitilicious Farm](#)

Zone 9b in California

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 05/11/2017 04:29PM by Michael Phillips.

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[Claude Jolicoeur](#)

[Re: Alternate bearing](#)

May 08, 2017 09:32PM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 226

Interestingly, there are opposing theories on this...

For my part, I read that heavy pruning on the "off" year was better to reestablish a yearly fruiting habit for trees that had a heavy alternating habit. And doing this did work for me (at least partly) on a number of trees...

The hypothesis behind is that it is on the second year that fruit buds are formed. So if you prune heavily on the "off" year, you will get more growth on that year, then the following year (the "on" year), there will be formation of fruit buds on the preceding year's growth, that will produce on the following "off" year.

But really, I am not entirely convinced... I think regular pruning will encourage regular growth and regular production more than anything else... Naturally, some external factors like weather may change things - like no crop a year due to freeze will certainly induce a bumper crop the following year.

Claude

[Jolicoeur Orchard](#)

Zone 4 in Quebec

Author, [The New Cider Maker's Handbook](#)

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[Michael Phillips](#)

[Re: Alternate bearing](#)

May 10, 2017 05:59PM

**Moderator**

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 621

Sweet Sixteen, Red Gravenstein, Gala, Goldrush, and Paulared have strong biennial tendencies here.

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[Mike Biltonen](#)

[Re: Alternate bearing](#)

May 12, 2017 01:26AM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 298

That's interesting because Gala, Goldrush, and Paulared especially are very annual when thinned properly. I haven't grown Sweet 16 much since I left Minnesota in 1999, And what's a Red Graventsein?

[Mike Biltonen, Know Your Roots](#)

Zone 5b in New York

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[Michael Phillips](#)

[Re: Alternate bearing](#)

May 12, 2017 04:09AM

**Moderator**

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 621

Agreed. If you don't thin these varieties aggressively, they go biennial. Which is what I think Zea asked growers to share. Join in you unlettered disciples of Pomona.

Red Grav is a sport mutation of the Gravenstein of Austrian fame. It does particularly well in northern reaches across to Nova Scotia.

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[Zea Sonnabend](#)

[Re: Alternate bearing](#)

May 12, 2017 08:28AM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 58

Our Galas are our most regular cropping variety, along with Granny Smith. We have to thin them very aggressively to get any size on them and that probably helps.

Partly what I was getting at in starting this thread is that building the nutrition for the future buds in the summer and fall by foliar sprays seems to be equally if not more important than all the thinning and pruning. It is so very interesting how different varieties behave under the same culture and in different regions.

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