



Harvest timing

Posted by [David Maxwell](#)

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[David Maxwell](#)

[Harvest timing](#)

August 18, 2013 09:12PM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 197

I had sort of forgotten about the angst I endure each year trying to figure out when and whether to harvest. May I pick your collective brains for advice? Each year my apples start falling off the trees, as early as the first week of August. Are dropped apples a sign that the fruit is mature? I think not. Generally, (but not always), the seeds are still white, and the flesh still pretty tart. But, for example, 1/3 of my crop of William's Pride was on the ground by August 8 this year. The fruit came away readily when "lifted with a slight twist". The seeds were brown. But some of them were pretty damn tart. Now I have a number of other cultivars with falling crops - Shoener aus Hernhutt, Jansen's seedling, Peasgood Nonsuch, plus a Malus pumilla. These are all pretty obscure cultivars, and one cannot just look up when they should be ripe. (But, looking at previous years, I don't think any of them are supposed to be ripe by Aug. 18). Wm's Pride isn't supposed to be ripe by Aug. 8, either.

Or is my problem that my apples are falling off the trees before they are ripe, and the falling should not be taken as any sort of a sign of maturity? If so, what do others do about this? (I believe commercial growers spray something called ReTain to prevent it -??)

(I infer that mine are not the only apples falling, given Michael's stern injunction to go and pick up the drops to reduce apple maggot next year - NOW.) But is Michael referring to apples which have abscised because they are infected with AMF, (or coddlers, or...)? Many of my drop apples have no sign of insect damage, and have healthy cores when cut open.

[Broomholm Orchard](#)

Zone 5b in Nova Scotia

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[Paul Weir](#)

[Re: Harvest timing](#)

August 20, 2013 09:22PM

Registered: 11 years ago

Posts: 187

I pondered this same thing about 3 weeks ago myself. When we had record temps at +/- 104 each day for 4 days in a row in early July.

Heavy sunburn resulted on my most exposed south facing fruit and about 25% of that fruit fell off the tree in the next 2-3 weeks. I wondered if an accelerated, yet chemically unbalanced, ripening might be the cause.

Upon some further initial research (e.g., Univ of Michigan and Cornell), ethylene was targeted as a suspected culprit with excessive heat coming prior to fruit fully ripening.

[Cornell's report on this topic was especially interesting.](#)

I believe this to have been the problem in my orchard this year. . . . at at 104-105 degrees, and with the intense sunlight I receive at my elevation, I don't blame those apples for reflecting that stress.

Possibly a similar situation in your orchard too?

[Gopher Hill Apples](#)

Zone 8 in California

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 04/01/2014 03:35PM by Michael Phillips.

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[Todd Parlo](#)

[Re: Harvest timing](#)

August 26, 2013 03:16PM

Registered: 10 years ago

Posts: 301

We also have been having excessive pre harvest drop here in Walden. I would add to the mix of causes, failure to do proper thinning. The trees we neglected have shed the most, and sadly not the bad ones. It is often stated that insect and diseased damaged fruit goes first, but often this is not the case. I picked up the fruit dropped from our Red Barons yesterday to find large and beautiful blemish free fruit on the ground with small deformed ones still hanging tightly. The tree cannot often support as large a crop as it sets, and it is no idiot, it expels the rest. Bunched apples will also physically push off fruit, as well as knock each other in breezes. Lack of water and nutrients will do the

same.. this is also why this dry period we had over the last week is likely to have caused more drop.

The more I look into this the more I realize that it is pretty normal to have a heck of a lot of drop without chemical intervention (auxins, alar, etc). Those of us that wince the most at wasted food and income will have the most trouble with this.

I will add a question that I will open in a new thread: [What can we do with those drops?](#)

[Walden Heights Nursery & Orchard](#)

Zone 3 in Vermont

Edited 1 time(s). Last edit at 04/01/2014 03:37PM by Michael Phillips.

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[Michael Potts](#)

[Re: Harvest timing](#)

September 17, 2013 07:59PM

David, thank you for starting this topic.

We, too, have seen premature dropping from our trees, and suspect it has been due to a relatively dry winter followed by an unduly warm, still summer.

As an example of the usefulness of this forum: I didn't know about picking up the dropped fruit to control apple maggot.

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[Zea Sonnabend](#)

[Re: Harvest timing](#)

August 06, 2016 09:11AM

I am revisiting this topic not so much because of early drops, but because of very early ripening season. We have found the tendency to drop early is variety specific and also related to thinning. Gravensteins and Williams Pride are notorious for dropping the second they are ripe or sometimes before. Jonagolds drop early a lot because they push each other off the trees. This is exacerbated because we don't thin them or else they get too big.

My problem is with young trees of many varieties that we don't have experience with, it is hard to tell when they are ripe. I searched the Internet for the ripening time for Elstar for instance, and found dates ranging from mid-August to mid-October, and also very different in relation to Gala (before or after). However, I picked ours on August 1 because they looked and tasted ripe, the seeds were dark, and they came off the tree easily. And some of our Gravensteins were ready by July 10, two weeks ahead of last year.

I am keeping records of our first picking each year, but the varieties are not ripening in the same relative order, or in a similar order to other parts of the country where they publish ripening charts. So confusing! So I'm thinking of just walking around every Monday morning and tasting about 10 apples that might be likely in the next week or so. When I have never tasted it before though, I don't know what the right flavor should be. Like Chehalis. It tastes so bland but I think it is almost ripe.

[Fruitilicious Farm](#)

Zone 9b in California

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[Michelle and Chris McColl](#)

[Re: Harvest timing](#)

August 14, 2016 02:14PM

After doing starch tests (spraying potassium iodide solution on cut apples) for many years, we now tend to judge ripeness from looking at the background colour, and to a lesser extent taste.

When the background colour goes from pale green to pale greenish yellow, that is a pretty good indication they are just about there. If the background colour is yellow with no sign of a greenish tinge remaining around the calyx, they probably aren't going to get any better being left on the tree.

If it is a variety with no background colour visible because there is so much red pigmentation (eg. Liberty), then it is when the colour goes from dull red to a bright "glowing" red. If there is green under the red, the red is dull. If there is yellow under the red, the red becomes bright.

We have seen many of the same issues. Gravenstein will drop readily here - they seem to ripen so rapidly that they can look green and immature one day, and then 30% might be yellow and on the ground two or three days later.

We don't have too much trouble with Jonagolds dropping. We do thin them, but can keep the size down to some extent by limiting the amount of irrigation the trees receive. We find if we don't thin Jonagold they tend to be paler, less flavour and softer.

We have also found the relative ripening time is not consistent between varieties every year. Age of tree, crop load and seasonal conditions (maybe amount of winter chill and weather conditions in Spring?) can have a bearing on ripening time. We too have found sometimes Elstar is before Gala, and sometimes after.

Probably safest to just keep checking the background colour, and taste.

Registered: 11 years ago
Posts: 21

Registered: 10 years ago
Posts: 58

Registered: 11 years ago
Posts: 49

Kalangadoo Orchard

On the “other side” in South Australia

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