Gardening: Too much fruit may not be a good thing

K-State horticulture expert says fruit trees should be thinned for a healthy crop next year

By Taylor Jamison, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — As fruit starts to appear on spring trees, an overabundance may seem like a good thing, but Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham said too much fruit could ruin next year’s crop.

“A heavy fruit crop can interfere with fruit bud development this summer,” Upham said. “This can result in a small to no crop next year.”

Upham recommends removing excess fruit, a process called “thinning.” In addition to prepping a healthy crop for next year, thinning can also prevent limb damage due to too much weight, and it can promote a larger-sized crop.

“Fruit trees are limited in how many fruit they can mature,” Upham said. “(If you get) too many fruit and fruit size, (then) the quality goes down.”

Thinning recommendations vary by tree type. Upham outlined the most common fruit spacing guidelines:

**Apples and Pears:** 6-8 inches apart.

Apples tend to cluster in groups of five; in that case, leave only the largest, nicest fruit in the cluster on the tree.

**Peaches:** 6-8 inches apart.

Peaches also tend to cluster. As long as the average distance between fruit is about seven inches, it should be fine.
Plums and Prunes: 4-5 inches apart.

Apricots: 2-4 inches apart.

An exception to these guidelines are cherries, as they do not need to be thinned and can produce a full fruit load.

Upham said the recommendations are only averages, but as long as the amount of fruit on the branch is close to the recommended spacing, next year’s crop quality should be secure.

Upham and his colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden- and yard-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

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K-State Research and Extension statewide offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

K-State Horticulture Newsletter: https://hnr.k-state.edu/extension/information-center/newsletters/index.html

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