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Almonds: Calendar of Operations for Home Gardeners

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Almonds are among the earliest-blooming among fruit and nut trees. As such, they are susceptible to spring frosts that can damage the blossoms or small, developing, immature nuts. Almond trees are best adapted to areas with less chance of spring frost and with warm, dry summers where the fruit can properly mature and cure. Almond trees grow well in most well-drained soils. Almost all almond varieties require a pollinizer variety nearby that blooms at the same time.

Winter Dormant Season

- Prune trees in December or January to shape the trees and to promote growth of new fruiting wood. Remove dead or diseased wood, overly vigorous water sprouts from the center of the tree and suckers from the base. On old, mature trees, prune out older fruiting wood to stimulate new growth and maintain fruitfulness.
- A dormant oil spray will help reduce European red mite, brown almond mite, and San Jose scale if these pests become a problem. In most cases this treatment is not needed.

Spring Bloom Season

- If rain threatens, control blossom brown rot with a fungicide spray at full bloom. If it is a wet spring, an additional fungicide spray applied 3 to 5 weeks after petal fall will help control shot hole, scab, and anthracnose diseases.
- Fertilize mature trees from February to March with 4 pounds of ammonium sulfate. Immediately follow a fertilizer application with an irrigation in order to dissolve the fertilizer and carry it into the root zone. This also helps prevent the loss of nitrogen to the atmosphere. From February through July, young trees benefit from much smaller but more frequent applications of fertilizer prior to rain or irrigation.
- If you use drip irrigation, apply just the amount of water needed to replace what is used by the tree and lost from the soil through evaporation.

If you use sprinkler or flood irrigation, water about every two weeks, and provide enough water to wet the soil to a depth of 18 to 24 inches. Water requirements will vary depending on environmental conditions and your soil type .

Summer Growing Season

- Continue regular irrigations every one to two weeks until rainfall and cooler weather arrive.
- Almonds are mature and can be harvested as soon as their hulls split and nuts can be removed easily from trees. The nuts are still green and quite moist at this time. Nuts do not have to dry on the tree before harvest. Almonds dry much more quickly when they have been removed from the tree and spread on the ground. To minimize pest problems in the drying nuts, harvest them as soon as possible after hull split. Separate the hulls from the nuts and discard the hulls. Dry the in-shell nuts in a protected location until the shells are dry and brown and the kernels have a nice crunch (about 5% moisture). Kernels can be left in the shell or removed for storage. Freeze in-shell nuts or shelled nutmeats for two weeks to kill worms. Store in sealed plastic bags to prevent re-infestation.

Autumn

- Prune out dead wood from October through November while trees are still in leaf and dead wood is easily visible.
- Clean up weeds or debris that may harbor insects or plant pathogens.
- Control and remove winter weeds that are near the tree trunk to reduce the chance of crown rot or rodent damage.
- Remove and destroy all old nuts left on the trees or the ground after harvest to reduce the number of overwintering navel orangeworms, the major almond worm pest.



For More Information

Consult these UC IPM Pest Notes online at <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu>:

Brown Rot
Shothole
Anthracnose
Scales
Spider Mites

You'll also find detailed information on many aspects of fruit and nut tree care in these titles and in other publications, slides sets, and videos from UC ANR:

California Master Gardener Handbook, publication 3382

Drip Irrigation in the Home Landscape, publication 21579

Pests of the Garden and Small Farm, publication 3332

Pruning Fruit and Nut Trees, publication 21171

Sweet Cherries for the Home Grounds, publication 2951

The UC Guide to Solving Garden and Landscape Problems, CD-ROM 3400

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WARNING ON THE USE OF CHEMICALS

Carefully follow all precautions and safety recommendations given on the container label. Store all chemicals in their original labeled containers in a locked cabinet or shed, away from foods or feeds, and out of the reach of children, unauthorized persons, pets, and livestock.

Confine chemicals to the property being treated. Avoid drift onto neighboring properties, especially gardens containing fruits and/or vegetables ready to be picked.

Mix and apply only the amount of pesticide you will need to complete the application. spray all the material according to label directions. Do not dispose of unused material by pouring down the drain or toilet. Do not pour on ground: soil or underground water supplies may be contaminated. follow label directions for disposing of container. Never burn pesticide containers.

PHYTOTOXICITY: Certain chemicals may cause plant injury if used at the wrong stage of plant development or when temperatures are too high. Injury may also result from excessive amounts or the wrong formulation or from mixing incompatible materials. Inert ingredients, such as wetters, spreaders, emulsifiers, diluents, and solvents, can cause plant injury. Since formulations are often changed by manufacturers, it is possible that plant injury may occur, even though no injury was noted in previous seasons.

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