

drought tips

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Drought Tactics for Apricots

Because apricot fruit matures relatively early in the season, apricot growers have an advantage in devising drought strategies. Following are guidelines to help apricot growers cope with water shortages. Note that these recommendations represent minimum irrigation applications.

Apricots, like most fruit trees, are sensitive to water shortages during the early stages of fruit growth and development (bloom to pit hardening). Water stress at these times generally leads to smaller fruit at harvest.

To ensure adequate fruit size when water supplies are limited, therefore, early varieties and apricots growing in early districts should not be water-stressed before harvest. Depending upon soil type, depth of rooting, and rainfall, between one and two full irrigations, wetting the profile as deeply bloom the following season. Another as possible (about 3 feet deep), should be sufficient.

Apricots are sensitive to severe water stress through flower bud differentiation (June to July). Consequently, it is important to apply at least one full irrigation during this period, preferably during the first part of July.

In later districts and for somewhat later-maturing varieties, trees can be moderately water stressed by having less water applied during the pit hardening period, stage II. Water can be allocated instead to the preharvest period during fruit growth swell.

All varieties and districts should receive at least one full irrigation during July to ensure a uniform and consistent bloom the following season. Another irrigation 1 month later would also be helpful.

Heavy fruit thinning as early as possible—even before reference size—will help fruit reach optimal size in water-short years.

Pruning in August after harvest can help reduce water loss and conserve water, as well as minimizing the chance of infection by *Eutypa* fungi.

Weeds and cover crops should be kept short and nitrogen fertilizer applications reduced when water supplies are limited.

Using the tactics described here will help apricot trees maintain productivity under drought conditions.

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