

Mature Fruit Tree(3+ yrs) Fertilization Guide

Month	Stone Fruit (NorCal)	Citrus (NorCal)
Jan	Dormant Sprays (Copper for leaf curl, oils for overwintering pests)	No fertilizer (Harvest and frost protection)
Feb	Pre-bloom N Helps 'wake up" tree from dormancy. Without enough stored energy, trees may leaf out late	1st feed (balanced) + Micro Helps correct deficiencies from winter "slow down" and supports strong flower development for better fruit setting later
Mar	Post-bloom NPK Supports early fruit development and waking root systems as soil temperature rises	N-heavy Citrus is actively pushing new growth, heavy Nitrogen pushes a nice spring flush that can support larger flower clusters
Apr	N+K (fruit sizing) Supports full leaf growth/photosynthesis and fruit sizing and firmness. Excess phosphorus can lock Micros(zinc/iron)	Balanced (fruit set) Helps blooms develop into young fruit, supports canopy development (more leaves=more photosynthesis)
May	Light N <i>if pale or weak growth</i> Careful not to use too much N, can cause soft fruit with reduced sweetness	Balanced (fruit sizing) Early fruit sizing, supports new leaf flush that supports fruit growth through photosynthesis. Canopy development before summer heat
Jun	Stop heavy N; use K if needed Final stages of fruit development, too much N makes for watery soft fruit. Use K to help firmness and sweetness	Light feed if needed If plant looks pale or weak, give light balanced feeding to keep canopy lush and green going into summer heat
Jul	No fertilizer Use compost and mulch mix for slow-release N, if pale use light N as a corrective measure. Too much N can cause leafy shoots instead of bud development	2nd feed (summer) Balanced feed is ok if citrus variety I still produces blooms, Citrus that is done blooming needs just N & K. Add Micros + Iron/Sulfur if needed
Aug	No fertilizer/Orchard Housekeeping Time Add K + Micros if needed to sick or weak looking trees that might have produced small/poorly developed fruit	N+micros Focus on N feeding to keep canopy dark green, and address deficiencies as needed with Micros + Iron/Sulfur
Sep	Compost/K Add compost/mulch to improve soil health, and K for bud strength	K (color/sweet) Use K to improve sweetness, rind strength and coloring. Use Micros to correct any deficiencies if needed
Oct	No fertilizer Add soil/compost if organic material is low to feed microbes	Final fall feed Balanced feeding to strengthen leaves going into winter and supports fruit quality
Nov	No fertilizer (Mulch/Compost)	No fertilizer (Mulch/Compost) *keep away from trunk
Dec	Dormant Sprays	No fertilizer (Harvest heavy branches and frost protection)

Nutrient Roles:

Nitrogen (N): Leaf & shoot growth (spring push).

Iron (Fe): Prevents yellowing (chlorosis), crucial for citrus in alkaline soils.

Phosphorus (P): Root strength, flower & fruit initiation.

Sulfur (S): Enhances protein formation, lowers soil pH for citrus uptake.

Potassium (K): Fruit sizing, sweetness, firmness.

Micronutrients (Fe, Zn, Mn, B): Especially important for citrus leaf health.

Calcium (Ca) & Magnesium (Mg): Fruit quality, leaf strength.

Fruit set is the stage when a tree decides **which flowers will become fruit**. It happens when flowers are pollinated, petals fall, the tiny fruit **stays attached instead of dropping**

Fruit sizing is when the tree supplies sugars, water, and nutrients to the developing fruit so it can **grow in size, firmness, and quality**. During this stage leaves produce sugars through photosynthesis, those sugars are moved into the fruit, adequate water allows the fruit to grow properly.

Citrus Chart Considerations

<i>Citrus Type</i>	<i>Adjustment Needed</i>	<i>What to Change</i>
<i>Oranges</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Follow chart as-is</i>
<i>Lemons</i>	<i>Minor</i>	<i>Lighter, more frequent feeds</i>
<i>Mandarins</i>	<i>Minor</i>	<i>Reduce N after Final fruit set(May-June)</i>
<i>Grapefruit</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Follow chart</i>
<i>Limes</i>	<i>Minor</i>	<i>Avoid late N in cool areas</i>
<i>Kumquat</i>	<i>Minor</i>	<i>Lower rates, especially containers</i>

***Reducing N after final fruit setting is crucial for Mandarins** that have thin rinds and shorter fruit hang time. Too many new leaves can steal carbohydrates from fruit and reduce sweetness and color which can result in bland/puffy fruit.

Grower's Reminders:

■ **Mulch & Compost:** Refresh Spring and Late Summer for soil health.

■ **Water:** Fertilizer must be watered in deeply to be effective

■ **Dosage:** **Young tree:** light feeding every 8-10 weeks; **Mature tree:** 1-3 lbs fertilizer split over season (depending on size and variety)

***Container Citrus/Avocado** requires more frequent light feeding (every 6-8 weeks)

■ **Bloom Care:** Support flowers with balanced feed; avoid insecticides during bloom.

■ **Pests:** Watch for leaf curl (stone fruit, early spring), citrus leaf miner (spring, summer).

Fall–Winter Orchard Care Guide

From One Season to the Next

For our readers we have made an easy-to-read Fall–Winter Orchard Care Guide, along with a fertilization chart designed to take some of the stress out of orchard care.

This guide is based on proven practices from citrus and stone fruit growers and is meant to help you get the most out of your trees. *Remember you don't have to follow every detail perfectly. The most important feedings are your balanced NPK applications; the rest are optional steps that help maximize fruit size, sweetness, and flavor.

And above all, don't underestimate the power of mulch and compost. Especially in the heat of summer, they insulate soil moisture, improve vitality, and create healthy soil that leads to strong trees and delicious fruit.

Off Season(Fall–Winter) Orchard Maintenance

As we enter fall–early winter, the off–season, this is when small steps make a big difference; from cleaning up fallen fruit and pruning out deadwood to refreshing mulch/compost and checking your irrigation system. Taking care of these tasks not only keeps your orchard healthy but also sets your trees up for stronger growth and better harvests in the coming season.

1. Soil & Fertility Prep

- Compost & mulch: **Apply a fresh 2–4" mulch/compost mix** around trees (not touching the trunk). This improves soil health, moisture retention, and boosts microbial activity over winter.
- Sulfur applications (if needed): If soil is alkaline (common in CA), fall is a good time to **add elemental sulfur** so winter rains can help lower pH gradually.
- Potassium & micronutrients: Fall is a good time to **apply K or Micros** if a deficiency is noticed, roots stay active longer than leaves.

2. Pruning & Tree Structure

- Light pruning post–harvest: **Remove dead, diseased, or crossing branches.**
- Open canopy shaping: **Improves light penetration and air circulation**, which reduces disease pressure next spring.
- Citrus caution: Hold off on heavy pruning until spring, just **remove dead/damaged wood.**

3. Pest & Disease Management

- Orchard sanitation: **Rake and remove fallen fruit** (they harbor brown rot, codling moth larvae).
- Weed cleanup: Reduces overwintering sites for pests.
- Dormant sprays (late fall–winter): Plan dormant oil + copper sprays for stone fruit to control leaf curl, scale, and overwintering insects.

4. Irrigation & Water Management

- Deep water before winter rains (if dry): This helps trees **enter dormancy hydrated.**
- Irrigation system check: Flush lines, repair leaks, and prep timers for next season.

5. Planning for Next Year

- Research varieties of trees: plan for either bare-root or potted fruit trees
- Map orchard improvements: Consider **spacing, windbreaks, cover crops**.
- Cover crops (fall sowing): Plant legumes or mixed cover crops to **boost nitrogen and improve soil health for spring**.

6. General Tree Health

- Trunk protection: Repaint young trunks with white latex paint (50/50 diluted) to **prevent sunburn and borer entry**.
- Rodent control: Clear grass around trunks, install guards or Gopher Scram to **deter moles/voles/gophers**.

Understanding Fruiting Wood (Why Fall Care Matters)

Not all fruit trees produce fruit on the same type or age of wood. Knowing which wood produces fruit and how long it stays productive explains why late-season fertilizer and pruning choices matter so much.

Peaches & Nectarines

- Produce fruit on **1-year-old wood only**
- Shoots grown this summer carry **next year's crop**
- Excess nitrogen late in the season pushes leafy growth instead of strong fruit buds

Apricots & Plums

- Produce fruit on **short spurs and 2-5-year-old wood**
- Spurs stay productive for several years but weaken over time
- Balanced growth supports spur strength and long-term productivity

Cherries

- Produce fruit on **long-lived spurs**
- Spurs can remain productive for **5-10+ years**
- These trees benefit more from steady care than aggressive pruning or heavy feeding

Why This Matters in Fall

- Late nitrogen encourages soft growth that **does not harden properly**
- Trees prioritize leaves over **fruit bud formation**
- Potassium and compost support **bud strength, carbohydrate storage, and winter resilience**

Which Trees Use Spurs?

- Apricot, Plum, Cherry, Apple & Pear (for comparison)
- These trees rely on spurs for most of their crop.

Limited or No Spur Use

- Peach & Nectarine
 - Fruit almost entirely on 1-year-old shoots
 - Spurs are weak or non-productive
- *This is why peaches/nectarines are pruned so differently.**

*Remember for stone fruit, fall feeding doesn't grow fruit but it does prepare the wood that will.

Citrus Basics

- Citrus produces fruit on **mature wood**, not brand-new soft growth
- Flowers typically form on **wood that is at least 6-12 months old**
- Unlike stone fruit, citrus wood **remains productive for many years**

What This Means for Care & Fertilizing

- Citrus benefits from **steady, consistent feeding** rather than heavy seasonal cuts
- Excess nitrogen can cause excessive leaf flush with fewer flowers
- Healthy, dark green leaves support carbohydrate storage needed for bloom and fruit set

Pruning Considerations

- Citrus should be pruned lightly and selectively
- Removing too much mature wood can reduce flowering for the following season
- Structural pruning is best done **after frost risk passes**

Fall & Winter Care

- Fall and winter care focuses on **maintaining mature, productive wood**
- Potassium and micronutrients support fruit quality and leaf health
- Avoid forcing growth late in the season, citrus rewards patience

Winter Orchard Care (January-February)

What you do or don't do during January and February directly impacts spring bloom, disease pressure, and fruit quality.

Dormant Sprays (Stone Fruit)

- Copper sprays** help prevent peach leaf curl, shot hole, and bacterial diseases
- Dormant oils** control overwintering pests such as scale, mites, and aphid eggs
- Avoid spraying during rain or freezing temperatures

Stone Fruit Pruning Strategy

- Major pruning should be done **late winter** (Jan-Feb)
- Remove dead, diseased, or damaged wood, crossing branches, excess interior growth blocking sunlight
- Focus on **light penetration and airflow**, not size control alone

Citrus Pruning Strategy

- Avoid heavy pruning in winter
- Remove only **dead or damaged branches**
- Structural pruning is best done after frost risk has passed

Frost & Cold Protection

- Mulch helps insulate soil and protect roots from temperature swings
- Young citrus trees may need frost cloth during extreme or prolonged freezes

-Avoid pruning just before a frost, fresh cuts are more vulnerable

Irrigation & Soil Care

Trees still need **occasional deep watering** during dry winters but avoid overwatering, Winter rains help move fall-applied sulfur and compost into the root zone.

Winter Sets the Stage

Healthy spring growth starts with clean wood, balanced structure, stored energy, low disease/pest pressure. A well-maintained winter orchard produces strong blooms, better fruit set, and fewer problems later.

At Hodge's, we're here to make sure you're at-home orchard thrives. Whether you're just getting started or fine-tuning an established grove, you don't have to figure it all out on your own. Orchard care can take a little trial and error, and most trees only need a few small adjustments to get back on track.

Never hesitate to ask us questions, that's what we're here for. Our goal is to give you the tools, information, and ongoing support you need every step of the way. With the right guidance, your orchard can become healthier, more productive, and something you're truly proud of.