

AUGUST TIMELY HINTS for stone fruit production

Staying updated with the most effective trends in stone fruit production is difficult enough when considering the massive arsenal of cultivars and rootstocks. This is further complicated when considering the numerous stone fruit growing areas that our country is blessed with, each with their own soil and climate characteristics. The specific soil-climate-crop combinations each warrant a specific management regime and for this reason it is very difficult to be too specific in this written forum.

Instead we should try to understand the factors that influence our decision making as farm managers and consultants. To this end, we need to know what to look for in the soil and develop an understanding of what is happening in the tree. Also, we should know how we can manage in order to promote the positives and nullify the negatives. For the next 7 months "TIMELY HINTS" will provide stone fruit production guidelines while discussing misunderstood and overlooked practices that can reduce your risk and increase your profitability.

SOIL

General maintenance on your farm

- Clean drains of any debris or roots to ensure the drains are working optimally. Wet soils take longer to warm up (>13°C) and this will affect the bud break phase of trees in winter rainfall areas.
- Maintain roads and orchard floors in this period to facilitate tractor and spray cart movement.
- Maintain ridges to allow for an even surface. This will prevent puddling or run-off of irrigation water.

Last application of lime

- Lime should not be applied much later than the beginning of August.
- Lime has a very low solubility (approximately 2%) and needs ample time (May to September) and water (rain in winter rainfall areas and irrigation in summer rainfall areas) in order to react in the soil and rectify pH within the root zone.

Applying too much lime or applying lime too late may increase adverse interactions between elements.

Elements that are negatively affected by very high Calcium (Ca) concentration and pH are Zinc (Zn), Boron (B), Manganese (Mn), Magnesium (Mg), Iron (Fe), Potassium (K), Phosphorus (P). Thus stick to your advisor's recommendations.

IRRIGATION

Install irrigation for new developments

- If you have not done so already, install new irrigation systems for new developments.
- Do not wait until it is time to plant.



Ensure irrigation probes are appropriately placed and correctly installed

- Evaluate each soil moisture probe with regards to:
 - Data quality in the previous season: do you see clear trends?
 - Placement relative to the tree (in root zone?) and emitter (in wetted zone?)
 - Is the probe still in working condition?
- Decide whether any probes need to be repaired, moved, or reinstalled.
- Install any new soil moisture probes. Probes need to be representative of:
 - The largest soil body in the orchard.
 - Primary cultivar in the orchard.
 - Typical trees in the orchard (not a small sickly area or a small vigorous area)

Probes are a vital part of effective water management and it is recommended that you familiarise yourself with the hardware and software and costs (capital and time) of various offerings. BUT please make sure that you are informed when making your decision to use, or not use, soil moisture probes.

Prepare irrigation system

- Do as much maintenance on the system as possible before the onset of the irrigation season as to avoid mishaps in critical periods.

NUTRITION

Order your fertiliser

- Do a stocktake of available fertiliser. Clean the storeroom. Your new fertiliser will arrive soon.
- Order all fertilisers and foliar sprays if you have not done so already.

REST BREAKING OF PLUMS

This is one of the most critical actions on any stone fruit farm. The aim must be to get the tree to break rest uniformly and as condensed as possible. In South Africa, we never have enough winter chilling for most of our pome fruit varieties and at least half of the stone fruit varieties, so rest breaking is critical.

- All peaches, nectarines, apricots, and plums should be divided into high chilling, medium chilling, or low chilling requirement cultivars and the choice of product must be made according to the chilling requirement of that specific cultivar. You should also take the number of cold units recorded for the year and the delayed foliation history of the orchard [into account].
 - **High chilling requirement cultivars** such as Gaviota and Southern Belle:
 - Dormex 0.5 Litres per 100 Litres Water plus
 - Bud break (or similar product) 2-4 Litres per 100 Litres Water.
 - **Medium Chilling Requirement Cultivars** such as Songold and Laetitia:



- 4 Litres Bud Break (or similar product) per 100 Litres water, or Dormex 0.5 Litres plus 2 Litres Bud Break per 100 Litres water.
- **Low Chilling Requirement Cultivars:**
 - 3 Litres Bud Break per 100 Litres water.
 - On some of the Low Chilling Requirement Cultivars, no rest breaking product is required. This is only applicable in areas with sufficient chill units to satisfy the requirements of cultivars.
- The following should be noted:
 - Rest breaking products to be sprayed at 70-90% of high volume requirement (minimum of 1000 Litres per hectare). Droplets 150 to 250 Micron will give best results.
 - It is important that you should experience some kind of bud swell before spraying but you do not want to spray later than the bud break stage.
 - With Dormex the pH of Spray Water is important, must be below 7.0 pH.
 - Damage is sometimes experienced, to avoid damage, it is essential to get thorough continuous agitation of the spray mixture in the tank.
 - Damage can also occur under the following conditions:
 - Stress Conditions caused by too wet or too dry soil or young unripe wood which normally occurs where growth continued until late Autumn/Winter.
 - When applying oil, best results are achieved if one has 2-3 days of warm weather after the oil spray so that the buds can sweat a bit under the film of oil.

If one can ensure good rest breaking, this will make farming for the rest of the year a lot easier, especially for thinning and harvesting. The more condensed and uniform the bloom, the better.

- There are other rest breaking products but in my experience, Dormex and Oil provide the best results. After the oil, if one wants to give the trees a boost, you can spray a week later with:
 - 1-1.5 kg of Potassium Nitrate plus
 - 6 ml Biowet per 100 Litres water.
- Very good results have been achieved where one sprays peaches and apricots with rest breaking sprays, normally oil at between 2-4 Litres per 100 Litres water is sufficient for most peaches, nectarines, and apricots.

POLLINATION

All peaches and nectarines are self-fertile and do not require cross-pollinators. Most apricots are self-fertile and don't need pollinators but we have seen the advantage of placing bees into apricot orchards to distribute the pollen in the flower. We have definitely seen higher yields where bees have been put into apricot orchards.



For 80% of plum varieties, cross-pollination is critical. The industry norm is to have at least 11% of a cross pollinator variety in an orchard, often 20% is more desirable and having two cross pollinating varieties in an orchard is also very advantageous as one year the one may be a little bit out of sync with the main variety and the other year the other variety is more in sync. For varieties that are difficult to pollinate like Songold, at least 25% cross-pollinators in the orchard are recommended.

- Cross-pollination is the biggest reason for not achieving the desired yields in a plum orchard. Where you have adequate cross-pollination and good bee hive activity, you can almost be assured of a good yield. This is one production input that you must not skimp on.
- For plums, you will require 3-6 bee hives per hectare from 20% blossom to 50% petal drop. You must make sure that the hives are of adequate strength and ideally with young brood.
- The advantage of rest breaking sprays in an orchard especially at high rates, [is that] it synchronises the pollinators much better with the main variety.
- Bee hives must not be put on the damp ground. They should be placed on crates, motor car tyres, or something that will take them off the damp ground. Also, they should ideally face east to catch the early morning sun. You should ensure that you do not apply chemicals that irritate or kill the bees.
- Local knowledge as to what the best pollinators are for the various varieties is your best source of information to determine which pollinators to use for which varieties.

PEST AND DISEASE CONTROL

- Bacterial diseases & Gumspot – all stone fruit: **Spray at first signs of bud movement** Copper Oxychloride @ 350g/hl. Last copper spray for the season whilst fruit is on trees.
- Scales and Mealy bug – all stone fruit. **At first signs of bud movement**, apply 2nd (final) 100ml/hl Dursban plus 500 ml/hl mineral oil for scale control. Add this to the copper.
- Leaf Curl – peaches and nectarines. Spray Thiram @ 150g/hl **5-7 days after copper** and **repeat every 4-7 days** (based on how wet trees are – dew and rain) before and after rain. Last spray 90% Petal Drop.
- Blossom Blight (*Monolinia laxa* brown rot) – all stone fruit: Spray Chronos @ 27 ml/hl **weekly from 1 week after the copper till full bloom**. In the case of peaches and nectarines add Chronos to the 30% blossom Thiram spray.
- Powdery Mildew – peaches, nectarines, and apricots: From **10% ball on**, apply 60 ml/hl Nimrod @ 10-14 day intervals till 90% petal drop. Apply wettable sulphur @ 300 g/hl from 90% petal drop onwards at 10-14 day intervals, till 35 days before expected harvest, if required. This wettable sulphur will also control brown rust.



- Blossom Complex Pests (Bollworm, Antestia, Fruit Nibbler, Green Peach Aphid) – all stone fruit: Spray Klartan @ 30 ml/hl @ 10-30% flower (before bees are put into orchards), as and where required. Do not spray after 90% petal drop. Klartan is “safe” for bees.
- Thrips – nectarines and plums: Apply 15 ml/hl Tracer @ 10% balloon and repeat 7-10 days later if needed. If bollworm is a problem, the Tracer can be sprayed at 20 ml/hl to cover for both thrips and bollworm. Safety window = 21 days on peaches and plums, 7 days on nectarines.
- Oriental Fruit Moth (OFM) – peaches and nectarines: Where required, hang traps (1 trap/2 Ha) early August at the latest.
- False Codling Moth (FCM) – all stone fruit: where required, hang traps (1 trap/2 Ha) early August at the latest.
- Brown Rust, Freckle, Gum spot – all stone fruit: Spray 150 g/hl Dithane at 75% petal drop and repeat 14 daily for 2-3 sprays, if needed (wet conditions). Safety window = 63 days on peaches, 42 days on apricots and nectarines and 35 days on plums.
- Fruit Weevil (Snout Beetle) – nectarines: Stem bands are the best form of weevil control and should be placed around tree trunks before the trees start to bloom. You need to ensure that there are no “ladders” of pruning shoots or weeds, allowing weevils to access the trees above the stem bands. For chemical control, spray 40 ml/hl Steward once weevils are caught in the monitor bands or @ 75% petal drop. Safety window = 28 days.
- Fruit Weevil (Snout Beetle) – apricots: Apply 20ml/hl Lamda-cyhalothrin when damage occurs as monitored above from petal drop on. Safety period = 28 days.
- Crown Gall – all stone fruit: All new trees’ roots should be dipped in RAS 84, before planting. 1 packet treats 50 trees. Agrobacterium radiobacter, a biological treatment is only preventative and not curative.

TIMELY HINTS contributors:

Soil, Irrigation, and Nutrition	Rest breaking and Pollination	Pest and Disease control
Mico Stander	Peter Dall	Andrew Hacking
Soil scientist	Technical consultant	Technical consultant
Agrimotion	Peter Dall Consultancy	Ad Lucem Agricultural Services
021 851 1051	028 272 9671	021 880 1905

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