

BEAT THE BIRDS TO GARDEN FRUIT

Beating the birds to backyard fruit crops can become a major challenge as the birds often harvest the fruit just before you think it is ready to pick. In some cases, the fruit itself is not the major target. Some birds are really going after insects, which have infested the fruit. These birds will leave the crop alone if the insects are controlled.

When birds are after the fruit itself, preventing them from eating the crop is the only way to save your fruit. Commercially available webbing may be purchased and draped over cherry trees or small strawberry patches. Be sure to tie it around the trunk or weigh down the ends with stones. The birds will still be able to reach in and get some of the fruit, but you can save the majority.

Pruning out branches in roosting trees can significantly reduce the amount of bird incursion into fruit growing areas in your yard. It reduces the birds perch access and subjects the birds who do land in the tree to greater exposure to the weather.

Some birds may be effectively scared away by dangling cloth strips from the tree branches or hanging pie tines that bang against each other. Artificial owls are another scare device. They resemble this predator enough to scare many birds away. However, the owl trick works only as long as you remember to move the owl to different perches at least once a day. Otherwise, the birds catch on that the owl isn't real and can't harm them.

Trapping is most effective if done when starlings and blackbirds first arrive in the vicinity of the orchard in the spring and approximately 30 days before the first fruit begins to ripen in summer.

Some fruit growers repel birds successfully for three or more days by using chemical repellents such as Hinder. Follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully and reapply after every rain and every 3-10 days as needed.

Frightening devices, when applied properly and in combination can be the most cost effective way to protect fruit in smaller orchards. These systems include motion detectors, electronic noise systems, recorded bird alarm and distress cries, and scare balloons. Also available is a bird scare tape: a special red and silver Aluminum-Mylar tape, stretched across the field at least 18 inches above blueberry bushes and strawberry plants. The tape should be twisted so that the interval of red/silver is 16 inches. The space between tapes may have to be no more than 5 to 10 feet to be effective.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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