

## Harvesting Apples

The harvest season is fast approaching, and I have already observed summer apples ripening. The two most common summer apples include Lodi and Yellow Transparent. They are generally well flavored but must be eaten or processed quickly, as they do not store for more than a few weeks, at best. They are especially useful for sauce. Two slightly later ripening summer apples to consider include Zestar and Sansa. Both keep between 6 and 8 weeks.

For autumn-ripening varieties and fruiting pears, codling moth control is still required into mid September. There are several strategies for control. Early in the season, apples should have been thinned when they were the size of a small marble or slightly larger. Properly thinned trees have one apple for every 6 inches of branch. Codling moth adults prefer to lay eggs on un-thinned fruit in areas where apples touch. Further, not thinning makes it more difficult to obtain complete coverage of apples with sprays. It is also important to remove leftover fruit from the ground and trees in the fall. This fruit is a breeding ground for diseases and pests. Along with insect control, thinning is beneficial for the following reasons:

- It encourages trees to produce annually instead of biennially
- It reduces branch breakage from excessive fruit loads
- It minimizes overall tree stress

Even when using other methods, pesticides are usually needed to reduce codling moth numbers. Two soft chemicals labeled for control include neem oil and spinosad. These are considered to be safer for humans and animals and friendlier to non-target insects while still controlling a significant number of insects. However, they do not reduce numbers as effectively as synthetic pesticides such as permethrin, carbaryl or malathion.

Another question I commonly receive concerning apples is how to determine when the fruit is ripe. One of the best methods is simply by taste. If the apple tastes like it is supposed to, it is most likely ripe. Other indicators include:

- Color change of skin from green to yellow or green to red.
- Healthy apples dropping from the tree around the time of ripening.
- Flesh between the skin and core of many red types changing from a greenish color to white.
- Apples that can be easily removed from the tree without damaging the spur.
- Seeds in the core that turn dark brown.

Pick ripe apples from the tree by pulling fruit upward and outward while rotating the fruit slightly. On some thin, long-stemmed varieties such as Golden Delicious, it is sometimes necessary to firmly place the index finger at the point of attachment of the stem and branch. Research has shown that apples picked with their stem attached to the fruit keep longer than those with the stem removed.

Apples should be stored at temperatures just above freezing and at high humidity. Frequently check for rotten fruit. Not removing one rotten apple really does spoil the bunch.