

# Living Among Orchards

Over 200,000 tons of apples, pears and cherries are produced annually in this valley, making the tree fruit industry the largest economic sector in the county. In short, this is a farming community. So now that you own land in orchard country, what can you expect?

These activities are all part of normal farm operations, protected by the Oregon Right to Farm Bill.

**Winter** (November through February): Pruning time. There will be workers in the orchards. In February you may hear the high pitched whine of orchard sprayers as they cover the trees with oil and sulfur to control insects and diseases.

There also may be loud helicopter-like sounds of frost fans as they are tested before frost season.

**Spring** (March through June): Frost control, bloom time and insect/disease control season. From dusk until past dawn you may hear the fans moving the cold air out of the orchard to protect the blossoms from frost. On those frosty mornings, clouds of smoke from smudge pots may hang low over the valley. You may hear the whine of the orchard sprayers just before, during and after bloom, protecting the fruit from insects and diseases.

**Summer** (July and August): Irrigation, growing and harvest time. The orchard sprayers may be applying more sprays for insects and diseases. You may hear bird control devices (cannons and bird distress calls) near harvest. Harvest begins with cherries in late June or early July and continues with early pear varieties in August. Orchard workers will be picking fruit into bins to be loaded onto trucks. Traffic may be slowed by trucks hauling fruit to the packing houses.

**Fall** (September and October): Harvest time continues with winter pears and apples. Allow more time to get to your destination as you will be sharing the road with slow-moving trucks. After harvest you will again hear the orchard sprayers applying oil and sulfur to control over-wintering insects. Other fertilizers including dusty, white lime are applied to the ground.

Orchards are private property on which the orchardist is dependent for making his living. Like any private

property, access to your neighbor's orchard or vineyard is not permitted unless you and your neighbor have an agreement. Unauthorized access is trespassing and can be dangerous during certain activities, especially around powered orchard equipment.

**How Might You Affect a Commercial Orchard?** If you have backyard fruit trees, you can do yourself and your neighbors a big favor by controlling insects and diseases. If you do not manage your fruit trees, they may be acting as a host for the spread of pests and diseases to neighboring commercial orchards. In Hood River County, controlling fruit pests is the law. County Ordinance #263 requires that fruit tree diseases and pests be controlled on host plants. If they are not, the county may require destruction of the crop or trees at the owner's expense.

If you are willing to remove your fruit trees, call the Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers (formerly the Hood River Grower-Shipper Association) and register for their "Backyard Tree Program." Once they confirm that you have removed the trees, they will send you a coupon to purchase alternate plants at a local nursery. If you intend to keep your home fruit trees, contact the Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service for information on pest control methods.

You should also know that growth regulator herbicides, sometimes referred to as phenoxy-type herbicides, (such as Crossbow®) often used for residential weed control can be devastating to orchards and vineyards. Many growth regulator herbicides may volatilize during high temperatures and be carried on the wind for miles. If the herbicide application can be traced, the applicator can be fined by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

We can all work together to ensure that agriculture continues to be a vital part of our local economy. For more information contact the OSU Extension Service.



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