

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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Messy Fruit Trees

I have heard from many homeowners who had ornamental pears that produced large amounts of fruit last year. Though this fruit is small, it is very messy, and people want to know why trees fruited last year and if the same thing will happen this year.

Ornamental pears normally bloom very early in the season. In fact they bloom so early that late spring frosts usually kill the pear fruit. Last year, that didn't happen. Our last frost came before these trees bloomed. Therefore, fruit developed, matured and eventually made a mess.

The chance is not good that this will happen again this year. It is possible, but it isn't likely. Kansas is known for late spring frosts. Therefore we suggest homeowners let nature take its course. However, if you wish to prevent fruit formation regardless of the weather, you can try a product called Florel. It is applied at full bloom and will kill the small, developing fruit. There have been mixed results with Florel in trials done in Wichita. At times it has worked very well and at other times not well at all. Again though, I believe the chances of messy fruit on ornamental pears this year is quite small even if you do nothing.

Time to plant peas

If you are anxious to get going with your garden, try planting peas as soon as the soil dries and the soil temperature reaches 40 degrees. To test the soil temperature use a metal soil thermometer, which is sold in many garden and hardware stores. Take temperature 2.5 inches deep at about 10 to 11 a.m. Diurnal variations affect soil temperature, with lowest readings after dawn and warmest around mid-afternoon. The late-morning reading gives a good average temperature. Also be sure to get a consistent reading for 4 to 5 days in a row before planting, and make sure a cold snap is not predicted.

We have several types of peas we can plant in Kansas. Probably the most common is the shelling pea and the old standard in this group is Little Marvel. Though Little Marvel is still on the recommended list, we have a number of others that do well including Green Arrow, Knight, Maestro, Burpeeana and Mr. Big. All of these are early maturing types that allow us to harvest a crop before the hot weather arrives and stops production.

Snow peas are those commonly used in stir-fry that have a crisp edible pod. Recommended varieties include Dwarf Grey Sugar, Mammoth Melting Sugar and Snow Green. Sugar snap peas resemble shelling peas but have a thick, fleshy pod and can be eaten fresh, steamed or cooked. Like snow peas, they are not shelled but eaten pod and all. Recommended varieties are Sugar Bon, Sugar Ann, Super Sugar Snap and Sugar Sprint.

Peas should be planted shallow, about one-half inch deep, to encourage rapid germination and emergence. Seed in the row should be spaced 2 inches apart. Many people often plant two rows 6 to 8 inches apart so the floppy plants can support one another. For some older varieties, this may not be enough. They may need trellising to support the growing vines. Fencing may be needed to keep rabbits away.