



# BLOSSOM Organic Garden Store



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Organic Growing Supplies for the Maritime Northwest

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Gardening Information Leaflet No.7

\$5.00

**“DOING IT RIGHT”**  
**ORGANIC ORCHARD CARE**  
**THE MINERAL-AUGMENTED ORGANIC WAY**  
*The Only Way to Grow!*

**Scope of Leaflet** — As used here, orchard refers to the range of fruit-bearing woody plants from trees to shrubs or bushes and vines to berry canes. It could mean a few trees or a row of raspberry plants on up to a large commercial planting of single or multiple crop varieties. However, the focus is on the small-scale homestead or back yard orchard. Organic Orchard care encompasses routine maintenance of established plants to include pruning, thinning, pest control (spraying, etc.) and fertilizing, all without toxic materials.

**Time of Care** — While some maintenance aspects can be done at other times, most of these tasks are conventionally performed during dry spells of late winter to very early spring. February is perhaps best when work in the vegetable garden is not needed and before heavy sap flow that can seep out of pruning cuts. This is also usually before buds open and are vulnerable to damage from sprays. Certain sprays need to be applied at certain times or frequencies during the dormant and growing periods or seasons. Another advantage of doing much of this work at this early time of the year is that the limbs are bare, enabling better viewing of the plant's structure and ease of access for pruning, plus less surface for spray coverage. Correct or good pruning can result in better quality and yield of fruit that otherwise would become a tangle of poor specimens and limbs.

**Pruning** — In this section fruit trees are the example in mind (whereas shrubs and vines may in some ways get similar treatment). In February, pruning is where to start. Removing distorted limbs and overgrowth, opening up interior space for better light, training for clearance, shape and structure guidance, etc. all serve to also permit close inspection of the tree for defects and problems. To prevent gangly and cluttered growth, some trees (such as apples) need to have last year's growth cut back a fourth to a third each winter. Cut just above a leaf bud that is facing to the outside. As you prune for shape and opening up, step back and walk around the tree to inspect it for good structure, limb separation and balanced form. You will need to refer to pruning books and pamphlets for more detail on pruning and trellising.

**Spraying** — The spraying of woody fruit-bearing plants with certain materials approved for organic treatment goes back many years and is premised on the expectation of insect pests and disease attacks to which cultivated plants are especially vulnerable. Spraying is one prong of a two-pronged approach to plant protection with nutritional feeding for internal strength and resistance being the second and long-term best solution. Dormant oil (now more commonly referred to as horticultural oil) that is more highly refined and less harsh on the plant's tender limbs (and even its foliage), is for insect control. The aim is to smother overwintering bugs and their eggs hidden in cracks, under bark and in harmless lichen growths. Lime-sulfur spray and copper sprays (most potent) are mainly for killing or retarding bacterial and fungal growths (i.e., disease pathogens). Other natural pesticides such as Bt, pyrethrin, and rotenone are used at later stages for specific insect control as needed. Look

first, then shoot. All of these sprays are best applied according to the rates and schedules on the product labels or published spray schedules.

P.S. The collection of all excess and dropped fruit and leaves and their cycling through a well made compost pile adds an extra measure of “sanitation” safety and converts a problem into an asset.

**Thinning and Dropping** — Some kinds of fruit trees experience overcrowding of their fruit. To get bigger (albeit fewer) fruit and harvest it is essential to go in while the unripe fruits are still quite small. Select for the best fruit in any cluster and remove the rest to where you can pass your fist between any two fruit left on the branch. This permits the tree to direct more of its nutrients into the fewer selected specimens. Sometimes the trees will do their own thinning in a “June drop” which probably represents rejection of the poorer specimens. A related phenomenon is known as “alternative year bearing” where a heavy bearing one year is followed by a poor showing the following year and the pattern is repeated until corrected. This behavior was once mysterious and viewed as natural, but we know now that it is a matter of steady nutrition (fertilizer) supply that takes the bust out of bust and boom and also improves the boom part. Reading the next section should make that clear and provide the solution.

**Fertilization** — Periodic fertilization of fruit bearing plants pays off in several ways and can be accomplished in three different ways, used separately or in combination. Trees and shrubs may be fertilized using organic fertilizer “spikes” dropped down in shallow holes driven every few feet in concentric rings (starting under the canopy and expanding beyond as the tree grows and its roots spread further and well beyond the “drip line”). A disadvantage may be the odor associated with the spikes that entices animals to dig them up.

A second method is foliar spraying with a diluted fertilizer such as liquid fish or liquid seaweed (or both) and various other natural fertilizer product concoctions or home-made “teas” mainly intended to supply trace minerals through the leaves. Obviously these are used only after the plant has begun to leaf out and well before leaves die in fall. While best viewed as a tonic or snack, foliar sprays are essentially supplemental to soil-applied fertilizers. Major nutrients are not well supplied through the leaves and unless they are present in sufficient quantity in the soil for root uptake, foliar spraying will not be effective. However, foliar spraying under the right conditions can have a dramatic effect on plant growth, crop yield and fruit quality. Foliar sprays can be applied once or twice a month, preferably to the bottom and top leaf surfaces, and on cloudy days or early or late in the day. The reason for this is that stomata through which liquids can pass close up when it is hot outside. P.S. Don’t worry about sunshine on wet leaves causing burning.

**Fertile Mulching** — This is a highly beneficial feeding practice that often results in tremendous improvement of fruit trees, shrubs, vines and canes. It is covered in greater detail in a separate Gardening Information Leaflet (G.I.L. No. 4). Numerous gardening customers who have tried the BLOSSOM Organic Fertile Mulching system (which employs our B.L.O.O.M. fertilizers and other fertilizing ingredients) have reported amazing results in relatively short time frames. Fruit production, quality and taste all go up markedly and very often there is dramatic visible recovery in plant health and condition of bark, foliage and fruit size accompanied by disappearance of disease and insect pests previously attacking the plant, chewing its leaves and riddling its fruit. You can obtain Gardening Information Leaflet No. 4 at our garden store or by going to [www.BlossomEra.com](http://www.BlossomEra.com).