



Why Backyard Fruit Trees Are Not for Everyone

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The Yakima Valley, Wenatchee Valley, and Columbia Basin regions of Washington State are considered the “tree-fruit baskets” of the United States (Figure 1). Together these areas produce the largest volume of deciduous tree fruit in the nation. Central Washington State’s dry weather, warm spring season, hot summer days, and cool autumn nights are ideal for the commercial production of apples, apricots, pears, plums, prunes, peaches, nectarines, and both sweet and tart cherries.

With over 230,000 acres of fruit orchards in these major fruit-growing areas of Washington, the incidence of fruit-tree insect pests is quite high. Key pests include the codling moth (*Cydia pomonella*) (Figures 2 and 3), which attacks apple and pear fruit and the western cherry fruit fly (*Rhagoletis indifferens*) (Figure 4), which attacks cherry fruit. In the state’s fruit-growing areas, these insect pests have no difficulty finding fruit trees to serve as plant hosts.

Before planting an apple, pear, or cherry tree for its beauty and bounty, residents who live in Washington’s major fruit-

producing areas should consider the downside of planting fruit trees in their home landscape. Throughout Washington State, homeowners need to be aware of the insect pests that can infest the fruit of these trees and contribute to the amount of work required to grow pest-free fruit.

Washington homeowners who plant apple, pear, or cherry trees are legally responsible for controlling the insect pests in host trees on their property (see Revised Code of Washington 15.09 at <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=15.09.060>). The rationale behind this law is to protect Washington State fruit growers from economic losses when fruits infested with insect pests are rejected in domestic and overseas markets. Economic losses are also linked to additional management strategies (often pesticide applications) that are required to protect crops when these pests migrate to commercial orchards from neglected backyard fruit trees.

Pest control typically requires multiple pesticide applications every year, or labor-intensive practices like bagging

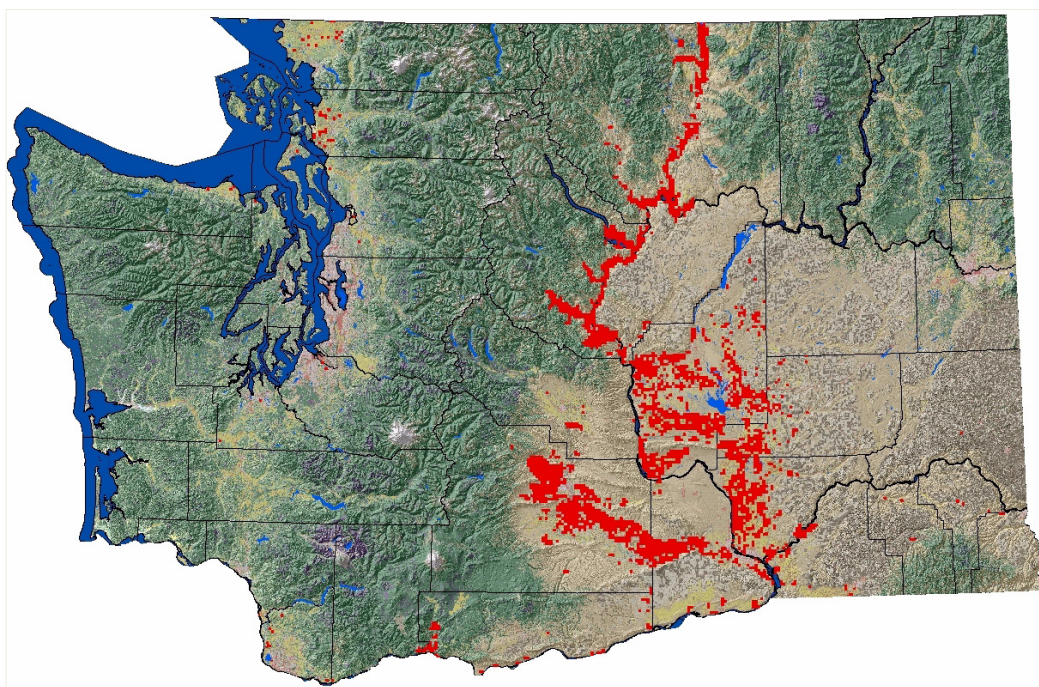


Figure 1. Distribution of tree-fruit orchards in Washington State (shown in red). Image from the *Washington Fruit Survey 2006*. (Courtesy Perry Beale, USDA-NASS.)



Figure 2. Backyard apple fruit infested with codling moth larvae. (Photo by Mike Bush, WSU Extension.)



Figure 3. Pear fruit infested with codling moth larvae. (Photo by J. Upton, Yakima County Horticultural Pest and Disease Board.)

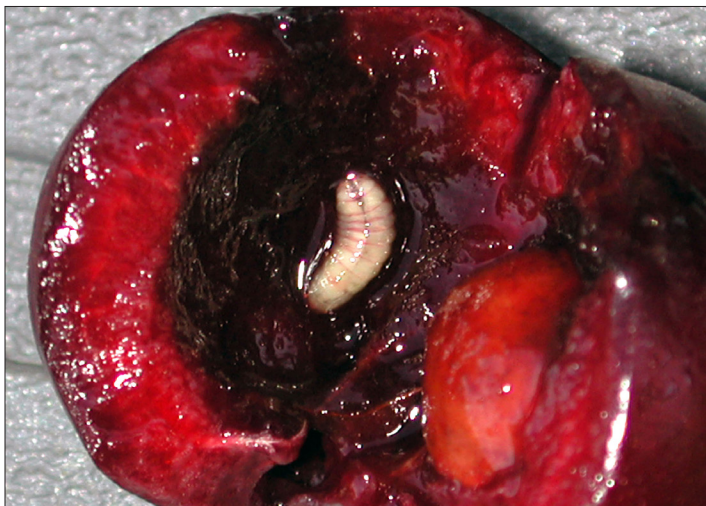


Figure 4. Sweet cherry fruit infested with a western cherry fruit fly larva. (Photo by Mike Bush, WSU Extension.)



Figure 5. Backyard apple tree fruit covered with apple bags to prevent apples from being infested with and damaged by codling moth larvae. (Photo by Mike Bush, WSU Extension.)

all the fruit on the tree (Figure 5). Furthermore, WSU, as well as many pesticide manufacturers, advises against foliar pesticide applications (that is spraying pesticides directly onto leaves) when trees are over ten feet tall. Homeowners should consult a commercial pesticide applicator for treatment of fruit trees over this height.

For homeowners who live in fruit-producing areas, it is far easier and cheaper to drive to a local fruit stand or farmers market than it is to deal with wormy fruit or to apply pesticides several times every year. Numerous WSU Extension publications provide information on how to control troublesome fruit-tree pests, both organically and conventionally. To obtain these WSU publications, contact your local WSU Extension office, or go to <https://pubs.wsu.edu/>.

Homeowners who still want to plant fruit trees should consider peach, nectarine, apricot, prune, or plum trees. The fruits of these trees are not regularly attacked by troublesome insect pests, so they may not require multiple pesticide applications during the growing season.

Further Readings

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