



PHILADELPHIA  
ORCHARD PROJECT



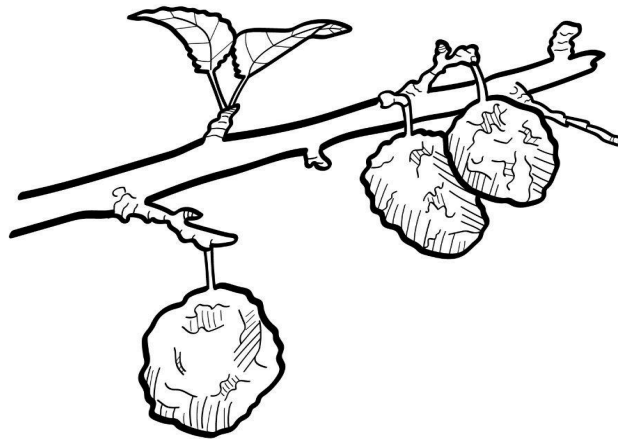
# ORCHARD CARE BASICS



# PHILADELPHIA ORCHARD PROJECT

## ORCHARD CARE BASICS

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# COMMUNITY ORCHARDS & URBAN FOOD FORESTS

This guide was developed by the Philadelphia Orchard Project (POP), a nonprofit organization that plants and supports community orchards, with 1,699 trees at 71 partner sites across 24 zip codes in Philadelphia. POP envisions the city as an interconnected food forest, where everyone has access to fresh food, clean air, and peaceful green spaces.

POP champions community orchards as a path for long-term community-owned change. Ecological orchards host a mutually beneficial variety of fruit trees as well as other edible and useful perennials (plants that live for several years). These spaces can provide nutritious food and medicine for generations to come, but there are many other benefits to the neighborhood — physical, mental, environmental, and even financial. They can help alleviate asthma, depression, air and water pollution, and summer heat, which can reduce bills. They bring people together and have been linked to safer neighborhoods.

Our model is grounded in long-term partnerships with community groups. POP provides partners with ongoing guidance, training, resources, and hands-on support. Partners own, maintain, harvest, and distribute to the community.

The orchards include diverse fruit and nut trees, berry bushes, fruiting vines, perennial vegetables, herbs, and groundcovers that build healthy soil and attract pollinators and other beneficial insects. Harvests have been used by afterschool programs, sold at neighborhood farm stands, donated to food pantries, and much of it is enjoyed by neighbors right off the trees.

**Questions? Comments? Get in touch!**

[info@phillyorchards.org](mailto:info@phillyorchards.org) [www.phillyorchards.org](http://www.phillyorchards.org) [@phillyorchards](https://twitter.com/phillyorchards)

Visit POP's online Resource Library at [www.phillyorchards.org/resources](http://www.phillyorchards.org/resources)



# BALANCING THE ECOSYSTEM

Building a balanced ecosystem within your orchard is a critical form of pest and disease management. A healthy system is grounded in living dynamic soils, rooted in the diverse understory habitat of flowering plants, and pollinated and protected by a buzzing population of beneficial insects, songbirds, predator birds, and bats. Fostering a well-balanced ecosystem is key to a self-sustaining, holistic orchard.

**The most important step when approaching pests and diseases is learning to identify what you see.**

There is a big difference between what a pest can do to a tree and what a disease can do to a tree. There are also many other things that can affect a tree's health, and it may be responding to different stressors such as the changing climate or a drought. Consider also that many of our common trees are from lands far away and experience stress, like any other living being, when taken out of their natural habitat, and they can be less resilient to native pests and diseases.

You may find multiple things going on. Sometimes one issue can lead to another problem, or move to another plant. Perhaps your tree was impacted by a pest, this pest could have left a wound, which turned into a disease.

We live in a society that urges us to solve problems overnight, to order a product and provide a quick fix without having a holistic understanding of the issue. We encourage resisting this urge and learning to see the orchard with different eyes. Over time, this will help identify and approach issues for long-term success.

# OBSERVATION & MONITORING

## Walk-Throughs

Orchard walk-throughs are essential for early detection and action for pest and disease issues.

Walk-throughs help identify signs and symptoms of harmful pests, support the monitoring of pest populations and trends, and track the life cycle stages of pests.

Walk-throughs also allow you to assess the severity of diseases in the trees and identify vulnerable areas in the orchard that may be more susceptible to pests and diseases, so you can be proactive.

One of the first things we want to do when we start developing a relationship with a new green space is engaging in a consistent process of observation. We want to build a relationship with our plants before something starts to go wrong, so we can better identify issues.

Observation is the first step. Then you could move to a diagnosis and only then consider what to do. A simple way to start this process is to keep a written or photo journal of your plant. Understanding what a plant looks like when it's healthy is key to identifying how it's affected by a pest or a disease. By setting these pictures as a "control" you can easily go back and see how it has changed over time.

### Items Needed

- Notebook dedicated to orchard walk-through notes
- Pen, pencil, or other writing tool
- Camera phone or digital camera
- Magnifying glass for detailed inspection (optional)
  
- POP [Resources](#), including the [Weed ID Guide](#), [Stone Fruit Pest & Disease Guide](#), and [Pest & Disease Scouting Guides](#).
  
- Helpful resources from other organizations, including [Giving Grove's Field Guide](#), [PennState Extension's Pest, Disease and Weed Identification website](#), and [iNaturalist's Seek app](#).

## Weekly Walk-Through Checklist

Adapted from Susan Poizner's *Orchard People: Integrated Pest Management for Fruit Trees* (2017)

### Monitor weekly

Walk through the orchard once at least once a week; In larger orchards walk in a W, X, or Z pattern to cover a variety of trees without stopping at each individual tree

### Choose the same time each week

Preferably in the morning, when pests are most active

### Inspect tree parts

Examine the bark, branches, and leaves of each tree

- Identify your tree type
- Start at the bottom and move upwards to avoid missing findings
- Check the roots and soil for suckers, damage, and adequate mulch and water
- Look for oozing, damage, or discoloration on the bark
- Inspect the undersides of leaves for eggs, larvae, or discoloration
- Examine branches for discoloration, damage, and eggs underneath

### Pay close attention to bordering trees

Pests and diseases typically affect these areas before hitting the center of the orchard

### Record your findings

Take notes and photos

- Trees inspected
- Signs & symptoms observed
- Date of walk-through
- Time of inspection
- Weather conditions

### Next steps

- Identify issues
- Take action to address issues



# WEED MANAGEMENT

**“Weeds” are simply unwanted plants. The goal of weeding is to ensure adequate amounts of water, nutrients, and sunlight reach the cultivated crop by removing unwanted competition.**

In annual systems, it is common to remove all plants except for the cultivated crop. In perennial systems like orchards and food forests, where plants have more established roots, it is beneficial to keep some of the “weeds” that strengthen the orchard ecosystem by improving the soil, attracting beneficial insects, or providing food or medicine. Weed management is still necessary to remove weeds that spread aggressively, and/or outcompete the cultivated crop for resources.

## Weed Identification

- If a plant is unwanted at a specific site, then it’s a weed.
- Consider the positive and negative qualities of different plants, and weigh them against the maintenance needs in your space.
- If working in someone else’s space, check in with the stewards of space to determine what is wanted/unwanted in different areas.
  
- Do a walkthrough of your site to familiarize yourself with existing vegetation.
  - ID and learn about plants
    - [POP Weed ID Guide](#)
    - Plant ID App: [Seek by iNaturalist](#)

## Weed Management Techniques

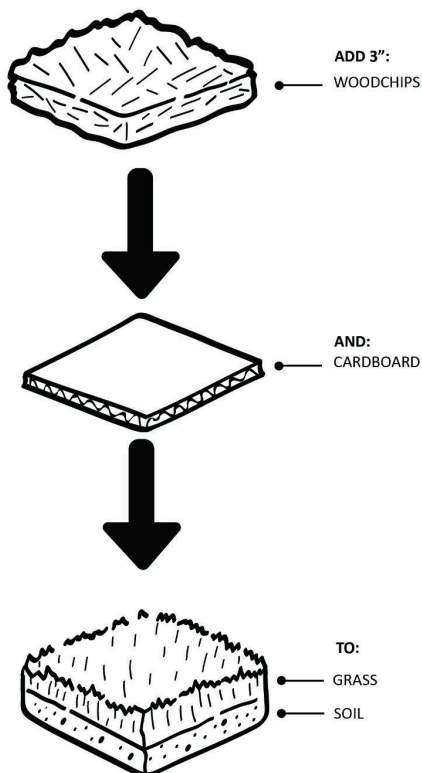
**Hand removal:** Most common technique for editing the plant palette.

- Remove roots to limit regrowth.
- Remove before it goes to seed.
- Monthly weeding is generally recommended for most orchard plantings.

**Sheet mulching:** Method used to suppress weeds and build soil health. Great method for converting lawn to garden bed. Does not work well on weeds with lateral roots, like mugwort, bindweed, thistle, etc. Best if applied in spring or summer, less effective in fall.

- Mow or cut down existing grass and weeds.
- Cover with an overlapping layer of cardboard.
- Add layer of compost or organic matter (optional).
- Finish by topping with woodchips. See 3 x 3 x 3 Rule below.

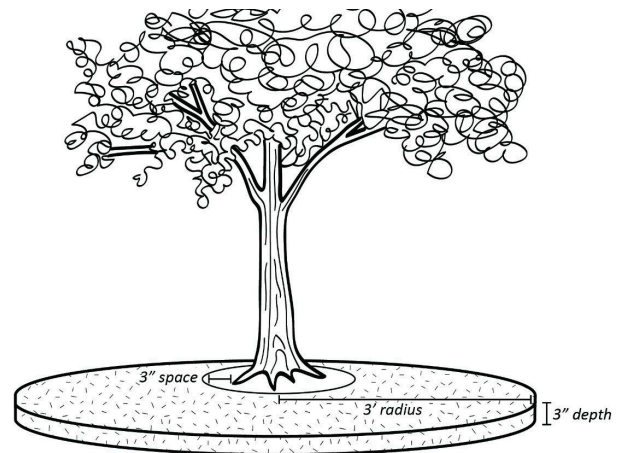
### Sheet Mulching



### 3 x 3 x 3 Rule

Top with Woodchips:

- 3" inches deep
- 3" inches away from trunk
- 3' feet wide radius



**Groundcover:** Plant quick low growing plants that outcompete weeds and protect soil.

- Full Sun: catmint, dwarf peppermint, oregano, thyme, strawberries, chamomile.
- Shade tolerant: Wild Ginger, Dwarf Goldenrod, Golden Star, Barren Strawberry.

**Chop and Drop:** Chop aerial parts of plant before it goes to seed, leaving roots in place. Spread leaves around to add organic matter to soil. Best effect with:

- Nitrogen fixing plants (legumes) which release nitrogen into the soil.
- Deeply rooted plants (comfrey and dandelions) which are able to bring up minerals from deeper in the soil profile.
- Avoid plants that propagate easily through cutting.

## Tools

- **Farm Knives:** Sharp curved blade that cuts through roots for removal without disturbing nearby plants.
- **Hori Hori:** Trowel with both a serrated and sharp edge. Great for both transplanting and weeding.
- **Trowels:** Great for digging out deeply rooted plants.
- **Hoes:** Many different styles. Usually long handle with a sharp blade, flat or angled, for cutting weeds just below surface level. Best for young, shallowly rooted weeds.
- **Garden Forks:** Great for loosening soil to remove roots of weeds
- **Spade Shovels:** Helpful with bigger rooted weeds, including woody vines and volunteer trees.
- **Gloves:** Wear gloves! Protect your hands!

# IRRIGATION

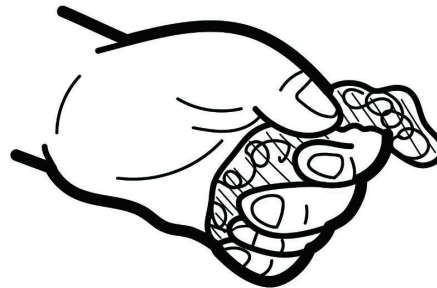
Adequate soil moisture is critical to plant health. It activates soil life, transports nutrients, regulates plant temperature, and reduces plant stress. Soil moisture is affected by weather conditions, soil type, and mulch use. The root systems of established perennial plants have access to soil moisture deep in the soil profile, allowing plants to thrive for weeks between rainfalls. However, when plants are young and during periods of drought, it is necessary to water your perennial plants.

## Are The Plants Thirsty?

1. Check weather history. ([Weather Underground — History](#))
  - For plants in the establishment phase (1st and 2nd year), check the total rain over the last week. If it rained less than 1" last week, add water according to the chart below.
  - For older, established plants, water after 3 weeks of less than 1" of rain combined. Refer to the chart below.
2. Look for visual signals of underwatering: Yellow and/or wilted leaves, curling or dropped leaves, dropped fruit, smaller than average fruit size. Confirm soil moisture by checking manually.
3. Check soil moisture at root depth (8-14" for fruit trees).
  - Dig a handful of soil at root depth. Squeeze soil in hand.
  - If the soil forms a ball, stains your hands, and feels sticky or slick, it does not need water.
  - If the soil does not form a ball or crumbles easily, and leaves little to no stain on your hands, add water according to the chart below.



Stain on hands



Forms ball

## How to Water

**Water entire root zone, from trunk to edge of the tree canopy.**

### Hand Watering (hose or bucket)

- Hose:
  - Water slowly so water stays in desired zone. If water is flowing out of the desired watering zone, reduce flow rate or return after surface water has had time to sink in. Soil should be moist to at least 3-4 inches depth when complete.
  - Typical flow rate for a hose is 10-12 gallons per minute, although it is recommended to test your rate by timing how long it takes to fill a 5 gallon bucket.
  - Turn hose down low and leave on for 1-2 hours. Move every 20 minutes until entire area underneath canopy is soaked or if water runoff outside of intended area occurs.
- Bucket:
  - 5 gallon bucket with a few 1/16" holes drilled into bottom or very low on sides.
  - Place bucket under canopy. Fill with water. Once emptied, move and repeat.

### Overhead Watering (oscillating sprinkler)

- Try to minimize leaves and canopy getting wet, potentially spreading fungal diseases.
- Avoid watering when windy.
- Move around every 1-2 hours to get full coverage of plantings

## Watering Schedule

<b>NEW PLANTINGS</b> (1st and 2nd year)	<b>Total Amount Per Week</b> (adjust based on % of 1" rain)	<b>Frequency</b>
Tree	10 gallons — <i>Example:</i> 0" rain → add 10 gal 0.5" rain → add 5 gal 1" rain or more → add 0 gal	2x / week for first 6 weeks; 1x / week through end of Nov
Shrub	2 gallons	2x / week for 6 weeks; 1x / week through end of Nov
Flower perennials and groundcovers	0.5-1 gallon	2x / week through end of Nov

<b>ESTABLISHED PLANTINGS</b> (in the ground at least 2 years)	<b>Total Amount Per Month</b> (water ONLY in dry conditions)	<b>Frequency</b> (water ONLY in dry conditions)
Tree (15' wide)	50-100 gallons	1-2x / month
Shrub (5' wide)	5-10 gallons	1-2x / month
Flower perennials and groundcovers	0.25-0.5 gallons	1-4x / month

Note: Potted plants and raised beds will require more frequent watering. The smaller the container or higher the bed, the more often it will need watering.



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Orchard:

Year:

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**Monthly Orchard Task List**

This is a reference and starting point that applies broadly to POP orchards and the plants included. Specifics will depend on each site and growing season. Please feel free to provide feedback on this form and to also send us a scan or picture at the end of the year, so we can continue to improve it!

Month	Task	Date(s)	Notes
<b>JAN</b>	<p><b>Prune Fruit Trees</b> (start with pome fruits and end with stone fruits) (all winter pruning can be completed anytime between Jan and early March) See POP Pruning Guide for more info Establish and renew permanent scaffold branches Open fruit trees to air and sunlight Remove dead, damaged, and diseased wood Remove crossing, competing, and crowding branches Remove most vertical growth and retain horizontal fruiting branches Follow tool sanitation guidelines and dispose of diseased prunings</p>		
	<p><b>Remove mummified fruit</b> Fruit left hanging on the tree is a source for disease spores. Pluck and remove any mummified fruit during pruning Trash, burn or use in hot compost system</p>		
	<p><b>Prune Woody Berry Bushes</b> (blueberries, currants, gooseberries, elderberries, etc) Remove dead, damaged, and diseased wood Remove approximately 25% of growth by cutting oldest branches to just above the ground Remove additional growth if overly crowded</p>		
	<p><b>Prune Brambles</b> (raspberries, blackberries, etc) Remove dead, damaged, and diseased wood Remove all 2nd year canes by cutting to ground Remove smaller first year canes if overly crowded Shorten first year canes (and side laterals on blackberries)</p>		
	<p><b>Prune Fruiting Vines</b> (grapes, hardy kiwis, etc) Remove dead, damaged, and diseased wood Remove up to 90% of woody growth, leaving some younger canes and buds to fruit Remove any growth that wraps around itself or other other object</p>		
	<p><b>Orchard tool maintenance</b> Clean, sharpen, and repair</p>		
	<b>FEB</b>	<p><b>Continue winter pruning</b></p>	
<p><b>Pest and disease management (as needed)</b> Remove mummified fruit - to reduce spread of disease. Dormant Oil Spray - for aphids and scale. Read and follow labels carefully (4% dilution). Sulfur/Copper Spray - Use only as last resort in case of severe crop losses or plant damage! Apply prior to bud swell for control of diseases including brown rot, fire blight, scab, peach leaf curl, etc. Wear protective clothing and eyewear and follow safety instructions.</p>			
<b>Definitions:</b>	<p>POME FRUITS have a small cluster of seeds at the center (apples, pears, and quince). STONE FRUITS have a pit in the center (apricots, cherries, hardy almonds, nectarines, peaches, and plums). DROPPED FRUITS fall to the ground before they're ripe, often due to pest or disease issues. Monitor and remove quickly (ideally every 2 days).</p>		
<b>References:</b>	<p><a href="https://extension.psu.edu/home-orchard-calendar">https://extension.psu.edu/home-orchard-calendar</a></p>		<p><i>The Holistic Orchard</i> by Michael Phillips</p>



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<b>MAR</b>	<b>Cut back dead herbaceous material</b> Disperse or compost seed heads and stalks if desired		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring</b> (weekly walk though)		
	<b>Pest and Disease Management</b> (as needed) Apply dormant oil spray before bud break (first sign of growth) for aphids, scale, etc (see Feb above) Good timing to run chickens or ducks through orchard for pest control Spray Serenade, Bt, Spinosad, neem, and/or holistic sprays timed to significant problem species as needed		
	<b>Apply compost, fertilizer, or compost tea</b> to feed root system Just before bloom Read and follow labels carefully		
<b>APR</b>	<b>Unwrap figs and pomegranates</b> Figs that were wrapped in Fall can now be uncovered		
	<b>Thorough Spring weeding and mulch</b> Reduce weed pressure over time via thorough weeding of undesired volunteer plants Apply thick layer of wood chips to reduce weed pressure and feed the forest floor Be sure not to build up mulch around tree bases Consider sheet mulching with a base layer of cardboard for added weed control		
	<b>Plant new trees, shrubs, vines, and herbaceous companion plants</b> Water new plants twice per week for the first month		
	<b>Holistic Orchard Sprays for general plant health and resilience</b> Compost tea, neem oil, and/or herbal sprays Often applied every 2 weeks or at 1/4" green, pink, and petal fall stages		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring</b> (weekly walk though)		
	<b>Pest and Disease Management</b> (as needed) Copper/Sulfur fungicides for severe fire blight pre-bloom. BT and Spinosad for rampant moth and larva infestations Kaolin clay for plum curculio and some moths Do not spray in heat of day, during bloom or close to harvest Read and follow labels carefully Only spray in response to specific issue Hang pheromone and sticky traps if monitoring moth mating flights		

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<b>MAY</b>	<b>Prune Figs after new growth starts</b> Cut out winter die back after new growth initiates Prune for shape and light penetration as desired		
	<b>Continue weeding and mulching</b> Reduce weed pressure over time via thorough weeding Subsequently apply a thick layer of wood chips to disturbed areas		
	<b>Water Spring planted trees, shrubs and perennials</b> - once per week first year		
	<b>Holistic Orchard Sprays for general plant health and resilience</b> Compost tea, neem oil, and/or herbal sprays Apply every 2 weeks		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring</b> (weekly walk though)		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring &amp; Management</b> (as needed) Emergency pruning: Remove dead, diseased, damaged & root suckers Prune out and dispose of wilted brown branch tips (known as flagging) on peaches and other stone fruit caused by oriental fruit moth. Spray Kaolin Clay, Serenade, Bt, Spinosad, and/or neem timed to significant problem species as needed		
	<b>Harvest:</b> Rhubarb, greens, sometimes gomis.		
<b>JUN</b>	<b>Continue weeding and mulching</b>		
	<b>Water Spring planted trees, shrubs and perennials</b> - once per week first year		
	<b>Thin fruit sets of Peaches, Pears, Apples and sometimes Plums &amp; Apricots</b> Remove all fruitlets from first year trees Apples, pears, and Asian pears should be hand-thinned to 5" apart, max one per cluster Peaches should be hand thinned to 6-8" apart Plums and Apricots can benefit from thinning to 3" apart Start by removing fruit with obvious disease and pest damage, leaving larger, healthy fruit		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring</b> (weekly walk though)		
	<b>Pest and Disease Management</b> (as needed) Emergency pruning: Remove dead, diseased, damaged & root suckers Prune out and dispose of flagging tips on peach and other stone fruits from oriental fruit moth Gather dropped fruit Spray Serenade, Bt, Spinosad, neem, and/or holistic sprays timed to significant problem species as needed Place bird netting over blueberries and cherries if desired Bag fruit when .5 -1" diameter for codling moth and apple maggot protection Beneficial insect releases: lacewings, trichogramma wasps Hang traps for apple maggot fly		
	<b>Harvest:</b> Rhubarb, strawberries, cherries, raspberries, blueberries, juneberries, honeyberries, gomis, currants, greens, some herbs		

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<b>JUL</b>	<b>Continue weeding</b> Reduce weed pressure over time with thorough weeding Subsequently apply a thick layer of wood chips to disturbed areas Make sure area around tree trunks are clear of both weeds and mulch		
	<b>Water Spring planted trees, shrubs and perennials</b> - once per week first year		
	<b>Emergency pruning:</b> Dead, diseased, damaged & root suckers		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring</b> (weekly walk though)		
	<b>Pest and Disease Management (as needed)</b> Spray Bt, Spinosad, neem, and/or holistic sprays timed to significant problem species as needed Remove dropped and diseased fruit Apply thick kaolin clay or neem to trunk for borers if needed		
	<b>Remove branch spreaders from winter and spring</b>		
	<b>Harvest:</b> Raspberries, blueberries, cherries, blackberries, apricots, peaches, mulberries, currants, gooseberries, herbs		
<b>AUG</b>	<b>Continue weeding</b>		
	<b>Water Spring planted trees, shrubs and perennials</b> - once per week first year		
	<b>Emergency pruning:</b> Dead, diseased, damaged & root suckers		
	<b>Summer bramble pruning</b> Remove dead second year canes anytime between now and following spring Cut back new blackberry canes at 3'-4' height to induce side branching		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring</b> (weekly walk though)		
	<b>Pest and Disease Management (as needed)</b> Spray Bt, Spinosad, neem, and/or holistic sprays timed to significant problem species as needed Remove dropped and diseased fruit Apply thick kaolin clay or neem to trunk for borers if needed		
	<b>Soil testing if desired</b>		
<b>Harvest:</b> Blackberries, peaches, plums, figs, Asian pears, apples, grapes, cornelian cherries, jujubes, elderberries, rose hips, chokeberries, maypops, herbs			
<b>SEP</b>	<b>Continue weeding</b> Reduce weed pressure over time with thorough weeding Subsequently apply a thick layer of wood chips to disturbed areas Make sure area around tree trunks are clear of both weeds and mulch		
	<b>Water Spring planted trees, shrubs and perennials</b> - once per week first year		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring</b> (weekly walk though)		
	<b>Pest and Disease Management (as needed)</b> Spray Bt, Spinosad, neem, and/or holistic sprays timed to significant problem species as needed Remove dropped fruit		
	<b>Harvest:</b> Apples, figs, pears, Asian pears, pawpaws, jujubes, almonds, hazels, everbearing raspberries, everbearing strawberries, quince, rose hips, pomegranates, grapes, kiwiberries, maypops, akebias, lingonberries, herbs		

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<b>OCT</b>	<b>Continue weeding</b>		
	<b>Water Spring planted trees, shrubs and perennials</b> - once per week first year		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring</b> (weekly walk though)		
	<b>Pest and Disease Management</b> (as needed) Remove decaying dropped fruit Gather and dispose of traps properly		
	<b>Plant &amp; transplant trees, shrubs and perennials</b> as desired Fall planting has a slightly higher success rate and lesser watering needs Water new plants twice per week through November in dry conditions		
	<b>Harvest:</b> Apples, pears, figs, persimmons, chestnuts, everbearing raspberries, quince, kiwiberries, che fruit, goji berries, lingonberries, wintergreen		
<b>NOV</b>	<b>Protect and wrap</b> figs and pomegranates after leaf drop Most figs need winter protection in our climate Use burlap, row cover, or wire cages packed with leaves		
	<b>Leaf management</b> Leaves of common fruits harbor disease After leaf fall, apply compost or compost tea to aid decomposition Otherwise, rake and discard diseased leaves and fallen fruit		
	<b>Pest and Disease Monitoring</b> (weekly walk though)		
	<b>Pest and Disease Management</b> (as needed) Remove decaying dropped fruit Potential holistic spray		
	<b>Water Fall planted trees, shrubs and perennials</b> - twice per week through Nov		
	<b>Harvest:</b> Persimmons, medlars, hawthorns, ginkgos		
<b>DEC</b>	<b>Protect and wrap</b> figs and pomegranates after leaf drop If not completed in November, see above		
	<b>Update records</b> Record nutrient and pesticide applications, pest pressure, yields, distribution, changes to plant list, and any other relevant data		
	<b>Celebrate and review the season's successes &amp; challenges</b>		
	<b>Complete Annual POP Partner Survey</b>		
	<b>Pest and Disease Management</b> Remove and trash or burn trunk bands, traps, etc		
	<b>Harvest:</b> Persimmons, medlars, hawthorns, ginkgos		

<b>Definitions:</b>	POME FRUITS have a small cluster of seeds at the center (apples, pears, and quince). STONE FRUITS have a pit in the center (apricots, cherries, hardy almonds, nectarines, peaches, and plums). DROPPED FRUITS fall to the ground before they're ripe, often due to pest or disease issues. Monitor and remove quickly (ideally every 2 days).
<b>References:</b>	<a href="https://extension.psu.edu/home-orchard-calendar">https://extension.psu.edu/home-orchard-calendar</a>   <i>The Holistic Orchard</i> by Michael Phillips







## ABOUT

This guide was developed by the Philadelphia Orchard Project (POP), a nonprofit organization that plants and supports community orchards, with 71 sites across 24 zip codes in Philadelphia.

POP envisions Philadelphia as an interconnected food forest, creating beautiful green spaces, connecting neighbors, providing hands-on learning experiences, and growing fresh fruit for generations to come. Our model is grounded in partnership with community groups. POP provides partners with guidance, training, resources, and hands-on support to plant and maintain ecological orchards. Partner groups own, maintain, harvest, and distribute within their community.

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Illustrations by Simone Shemshedini.

**Questions? Comments? Contact Us.**

[info@phillyorchards.org](mailto:info@phillyorchards.org) [www.phillyorchards.org](http://www.phillyorchards.org) [@phillyorchards](https://twitter.com/phillyorchards)



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