

Keeping birds from fruit

Is there anything more wonderful than the time when nectarines, apricots and grapes ripen on our backyard fruit trees and vines? Is there anything more distressing than seeing bird pecks on our potentially delicious fruit?



Birds are wonderful – their songs and antics can be truly entertaining. A winter’s entertainment can become a summer’s pest unfortunately, since birds enjoy fruit fresh from the tree as much as people do. Keeping them from devastating a fruit crop can be a major effort for any backyard orchardist, who may need to try several methods.

They may have become accustomed to coming to a yard in the winter because a considerate person put out bird seed. When fruit appears in the same general location, however, they apparently think that some benefactor put it out for them as well. They do not seem to grasp the concept that they are welcome to snack only during cool temperatures.

A quick web search for “keeping birds out of fruit trees” produces more than one and a half million results, so this is clearly not an isolated problem. It is possible to purchase items from online merchants as well as local home stores. There are many possible solutions, some of which are more effective than others. These include spiked barriers, which prevent the pests from sitting on roofs. This is fine for deterring pigeons, but will not do much for the finches and mockingbirds who settle in trees for a nibble.

Bird netting excludes them from branches and pecking the ripening peaches, but it is difficult to place netting over a tree, even a dwarf tree, singlehandedly. It is easier to drape over grape vines, but some birds will poke through the netting to get at the fruit.

Many of them rely on fright and confusion to deter birds. Devices that produce distress and predator calls are available to chase away pest birds.

Decoys that look like owls and other birds of prey are common, and some people have found them reasonably useful. Rolls of Mylar film can be strung loosely through the tree, and the movement of light confuses the pests.

It is also possible to recycle items that most people have in their homes. Loose balls of aluminum foil can be strung from branches, but old CDs from obsolescent computer software are even more effective. Simply run a string through the hole in the disk and hang it from a branch

where it can spin in the breeze. The light show that it produces is apparently quite frightening and few birds are undaunted by it.

Birds are surprisingly intelligent unfortunately, and sooner or later will ignore almost any single decoy. For this reason it is a good idea to have a number of methods in the backyard orchardist toolkit. A spray of water will scare a bird for the moment, but not keep it away. It is best to add or move CDs, use water and noise, and most important, keep vigilant. Yes, bird song is wonderful, but better when our tree fruit is not available.

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