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Zone 4 Fruit Tree Care Calendar

Months are typical for zone 4 (worked out from a representative location with average frosts May 4 and Oct 27). Shift them by your local frost dates and by what your trees are doing.

For apples, pears, plums and tart cherries. Only one or two varieties of peaches and persimmons are rated hardy here, so they have no tasks on this sheet. Check off each job as you do it; small print under a month lists short jobs still running from earlier.

All season, once started

ALL TREES

Order trees for spring planting (Oct–Jan)
Water new trees on a schedule (Apr–Oct)
Water deeply during dry spells (Apr–Oct)

PLUMS

Pick plums as they soften (Jul–Oct)

January

1 JOB

- ☐ Order trees for spring planting — continues

February

3 JOBS

- ☐ Clean and disinfect pruners when cutting diseased wood
- ☐ Remove fire blight cankers while dormant — Apples, pears
- ☐ Prune out black knot galls in late winter — Plums, tart cherries

March

8 JOBS

- ☐ Prune cherries in late winter, after hard cold — Tart cherries
- ☐ Prune in late winter, before bloom — Apples, pears
- ☐ Train young trees to a central leader — Apples, pears · Young trees
- ☐ Cut off root suckers and water sprouts — Apples
- ☐ Prune stone fruit in late winter, near bloom — Plums

Still going: Clean and disinfect pruners when cutting diseased wood; Remove fire blight cankers while dormant; Prune out black knot galls in late winter

April

15 JOBS

- ☐ Check bare-root trees the day they arrive — New trees
- ☐ Plant bare-root trees before growth begins — New trees
- ☐ Put a white trunk guard on — New trees
- ☐ Water new trees on a schedule — New trees
- ☐ Head back the new tree at planting — Apples, pears · New trees
- ☐ Cut back new stone fruit trees at planting — Plums · New trees
- ☐ Remove first-year stakes the next spring — Pears, plums, tart cherries · Young trees
- ☐ Remove first-year stakes, except on dwarf apples — Apples · Young trees
- ☐ Dormant oil window, if mites or scale were a problem † — Apples, pears · Bearing trees
- ☐ Feed weak trees a month before bloom
- ☐ Water deeply during dry spells
- ☐ Spread young branches just after bud break — Apples · Young trees
- ☐ Apple scab window, green tip to petal fall † — Apples · Bearing trees

Still going: Prune in late winter, before bloom; Prune stone fruit in late winter, near bloom

May

21 JOBS

- ☐ Plant potted trees after the last frost — New trees
- ☐ Keep a weed-free circle around young trees — Young trees
- ☐ Remove winter trunk wraps in spring — Young trees
- ☐ Loosen ties and guards as trunks grow — Young trees
- ☐ Keep insecticides off trees in bloom — Bearing trees
- ☐ Scout for pests as buds turn pink — Apples · Bearing trees
- ☐ Hang codling moth traps by first bloom — Apples, pears · Bearing trees
- ☐ Check trunk bases for borers — Apples
- ☐ Choose scaffold branches during the first summer — Plums · Young trees
- ☐ Hang yellow sticky traps for cherry fruit fly — Tart cherries · Bearing trees
- ☐ Plum curculio window opens at petal fall † — Apples · Bearing trees
- ☐ Cut out fire blight strikes promptly — Apples, pears
- ☐ Thin heavy pear crops early — Pears · Bearing trees
- ☐ Watch for plum curculio after petal fall — Plums · Bearing trees

Still going: Prune in late winter, before bloom; Prune stone fruit in late winter, near bloom; Put a white trunk guard on; Remove first-year stakes the next spring; Remove first-year stakes, except on dwarf apples; Spread young branches just after bud break; Apple scab window, green tip to petal fall

June

18 JOBS

- ☐ Bag apples against apple maggot after thinning — Apples · Bearing trees
- ☐ Thin apples to one per cluster — Apples · Bearing trees
- ☐ Cut root suckers to the ground — Plums, tart cherries
- ☐ Net trees against birds as fruit ripens — Plums, tart cherries · Bearing trees
- ☐ Pinch out shoots competing with the leader — Apples · Young trees
- ☐ Rub off water sprouts in early summer — Apples · Bearing trees
- ☐ Hang red sphere traps for apple maggot — Apples · Bearing trees
- ☐ Thin heavy plum crops to 3–4 inches — Plums · Bearing trees
- ☐ Pick tart cherries when soft and full-flavored — Tart cherries · Bearing trees

Still going: Put a white trunk guard on; Plant potted trees after the last frost; Keep a weed-free circle around young trees; Choose scaffold branches during the first summer; Hang yellow sticky traps for cherry fruit fly; Plum curculio window opens at petal fall; Cut out fire blight strikes promptly; Thin heavy pear crops early; Watch for plum curculio after petal fall

† Timing only. Follow your state or provincial extension's home-orchard spray guide and the product label.

Sources: Iowa State University Extension and Outreach; Oregon State University Extension Service; University of Saskatchewan and 13 more (full list at the web address on the left)

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July

10 JOBS

- ☐ Collect fallen cherries as fruit ripens — Tart cherries · Bearing trees
- ☐ Prop or lighten limbs bowing under fruit — Apples, pears, plums · Bearing trees
- ☐ Pick plums as they soften — Plums · Bearing trees

Still going: Choose scaffold branches during the first summer; Cut root suckers to the ground; Net trees against birds as fruit ripens; Pinch out shoots competing with the leader; Rub off water sprouts in early summer; Thin heavy plum crops to 3–4 inches; Pick tart cherries when soft and full-flavored

August

3 JOBS

- ☐ Skip feeding and pruning in late summer

Still going: Net trees against birds as fruit ripens; Prop or lighten limbs bowing under fruit

September

6 JOBS

- ☐ Pick apples as the ground color turns — Apples · Bearing trees
- ☐ Pick European pears mature but unripe — Pears · Bearing trees
- ☐ Chill the harvest quickly and keep it humid — Apples, pears · Bearing trees
- ☐ Test the planting site's soil — New trees

Still going: Prop or lighten limbs bowing under fruit; Skip feeding and pruning in late summer

October

6 JOBS

- ☐ Order trees for spring planting — New trees
- ☐ Remove mummies, fallen fruit and dead twigs — Plums, tart cherries · Bearing trees

Still going: Pick apples as the ground color turns; Pick European pears mature but unripe; Chill the harvest quickly and keep it humid; Test the planting site's soil

November

12 JOBS

- ☐ Wrap young trunks against winter sunscald — Young trees
- ☐ Cut grass short around young trees — Young trees
- ☐ Fit hardware-cloth guards against mice and rabbits — Young trees
- ☐ Fence or cage trees where deer browse
- ☐ Water deeply before the ground freezes
- ☐ Mulch new trees and fill soil cracks — New trees
- ☐ Rake up and destroy fallen leaves — Pears
- ☐ Rake up fallen leaves and fruit — Apples

Still going: Pick apples as the ground color turns; Chill the harvest quickly and keep it humid; Test the planting site's soil; Remove mummies, fallen fruit and dead twigs

December

9 JOBS

- ☐ Wrap young trunks against winter sunscald — continues
- ☐ Cut grass short around young trees — continues
- ☐ Fit hardware-cloth guards against mice and rabbits — continues

Still going: Test the planting site's soil; Fence or cage trees where deer browse; Water deeply before the ground freezes; Mulch new trees and fill soil cracks; Rake up and destroy fallen leaves; Rake up fallen leaves and fruit

Notes

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