

## **Where Did All These Pears Come From?**

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Recently, I had a caller ask me what he can do about a pear tree heavy laden with pears. Pears and apples are famous for heavy fruit one year and none the next. Many people believe that this is a natural cycle and they let their tree go about its business in this way. Although this may be true, it is somewhat faulty to think this way.

Fruit trees, like all plants, use light energy to produce sugar in a process called photosynthesis. These sugars are stored in the roots of the tree. During low fruit production years, sugar accumulates and eventually the tree goes crazy, producing an abundant amount of apples. Flowering and fruit production requires lots of energy. This energy comes from these stored sugars. The tree takes a few years to store energy and then depletes energy to produce tons of fruit.

The question remains whether or not we should allow our trees to get into this type of a pattern. The weight of all these apples can cause tree splitting and limb breakage. Large wounds will occur when a tree splits. Disease and insect problems may soon follow. As these sugars are used during heavy fruiting years, the general health of the tree can decline predisposing it again to insects and disease. You may end up with a whole lot of apples that most people will never use.

In the case of the splitting fruit tree, fruit thinning comes to my mind. In early summer after fruit sets, about the time the fruits are marble sized, many of these “extra” fruit can be removed from the tree. Fruit clusters may have between three and five or even six fruit on each spur. Remove all but one or two fruit per cluster. The tree will respond by putting all of its energy into these fewer fruits.

This practice will accomplish several things from the tree's perspective. The limbs of the tree will not break as easily, sugars in storage will be reserved and replenished quicker, and you will not have to find places to unload massive amounts of fruit. In addition to these advantages the fruit quality will be better. Sweeter, bigger, and tastier fruit are always a hit in the fall. I know what you are thinking. “What good does this information do me now if my tree has split?”

First, cut off at least one of the limbs. Staking or tying may seem like a logical thing to do but healing will not take place fast enough to become sufficiently strong to hold the weight of the limb in the future. Secondly, do not paint the wound with pruning paint or any other sealant. This only seals in the bad stuff, like disease, moisture, and insects. The wound needs to be able to breath for healing. Thirdly, trim up any rough edges as this will help in speeding up the healing process. Fourth, think about fruit thinning in the future as the tree will have other heavy fruit years and may split again later on.

If you have additional questions or comments about this article feel free to call me at 605-394-2188 or email me at [ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu](mailto:ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu).