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Hormone Sprays
for APRICOTS

By J. CRIPPS, B.Sc. (Hort.), Research Officer

VARIOUS hormone sprays have been applied to apricots with the object of increasing fruit size and hastening maturity, and of these 245TA, the tri-ethanol amine salt of 245 trichlorophenoxyacetic acid, has in general, proved the most successful. The increase in fruit diameter obtained with this spray in Western Australia has varied between 5 and 15 per cent, and is due to an increase in the size of the cells within the fruit, not to the production of a greater number of cells.

Larger fruit is of course of advantage to the grower, but it is felt that advanced maturity is of greater economic advantage in the case of the Newcastle variety, for it has been observed that prices for fruit fall rapidly early in the season. Therefore, if the crop can be marketed a few days earlier, a higher return will result and fruit sprayed with 245TA matures five to seven days earlier than unsprayed fruit.

The observant reader will discern a further advantage here, in that the harvesting of a crop of apricots can be spread over a longer period if only half the trees in a planting of one variety are sprayed.

Lastly hormone spraying reduces pre-harvest drop and increases fruit colour, while flavour remains unaffected.

METHOD OF APPLICATION

The concentration of hormone employed is largely determined by the tendency of fruit sprayed with high concentrations to split. This tendency to split varies according to variety and with growing conditions.

For instance, fruit of young vigorously-growing trees receiving heavy irrigation is more liable to split than fruit of old trees grown under adverse conditions.

In the case of the variety Newcastle, a concentration of ten parts per million has been found to be safe provided that the trees are not watered during the three weeks before harvest. Watering before harvest can incidentally result in splitting even in the absence of hormone application. The varieties Moorpark, Tilton Trevatt and Royal can be sprayed at 12½ p.p.m. but Blenheim and Oullins should not under any circumstances be sprayed with 245TA.

The correct timing of the spray application is important since late application reduces the benefit obtained and the spray should be applied at the commencement of pit hardening.

This stage in the development of the fruit can be detected by cutting a few fruit with a sharp knife when it will be found that, although the pit is still soft, its pointed end at the base of the fruit fails to allow the passage of the knife. This stage is reached approximately four weeks after full blossom with the variety Newcastle, and five to six weeks with mid season and late varieties.

A spreader must be included with the spray to give reliable results and a detergent type should be utilised. Also thorough spraying is essential, and two to four gallons of spray per tree should be applied.

Recommendations for the use of 245TA on apricots may therefore be summarised as follows:

(1) Apply the hormone at 10 parts per million to the Newcastle variety and 12½ parts per million to other varieties.

(2) Do not spray Blenheim or Oullins with 245TA.
(3) Apply the spray one month after pit hardening. Include a spreader and spray thoroughly.

After spraying, the grower will probably observe a certain amount of foliage wilting coupled with a stoppage of the new growth, but these effects are only temporary and need not cause alarm. In conclusion it is essential that fruit growers realise that hormone spraying cannot be employed as a substitute for thinning as it is less effective when applied to trees carrying a very heavy crop. Thinning should therefore be carried out before spray application either by hand or by the spray thinning method described in a previous article published in "The Journal of Agriculture of Western Australia" Vol 8 (Third Series), No. 3 (May-June, 1959), Page 361. This article "Spray Thinning of Newcastle Apricots" was reprinted as Bulletin 2642.

Growers wishing to employ hormone sprays would be well advised to contact their local Horticultural Adviser or Instructor for more detailed advice.

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