

## THINNING APPLES

Apples are borne on short shoots called spurs. Those spurs that bear apples this year won't bloom next spring. If most of the spurs on a tree bear fruit this year, the tree will have little or no bloom next spring. The tendency to alternate-year or biennial bearing varies between varieties. Some varieties are strongly biennial; others tend to bear more regularly.

Removal of all the fruit on a spur, if done within about three to four weeks following full bloom, will usually allow that spur to bloom again the next year. Thinning done more than a month after full bloom does not increase return bloom, but it does increase fruit size. Commercial orchardists thin apples with chemical sprays and by hand thinning, but these methods are not practical for homeowners because there are so many factors which influence their effectiveness. Results can vary from no thinning to near total removal of the crop.

Hand thinning, in which smaller, misshapen or diseased fruit are removed, is one good way of improving fruit quality. The apples need to be thinned when they are nickel size. In thinning, only about 10-20% of the apples need to be left. Usually there will be 2 to 5 apples per spur or cluster. Remove apples that are small, misshapen, or diseased. Only one apple per spur is needed. Then determine the size you want the fruit to be:

fruit 2-1/2" diameter, thin 4" apart

fruit 3-1/2" diameter, thin 6" apart

fruit 4-1/2" diameter, thin 8" apart

fruit 5-1/2" diameter, thin 10" apart

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