



## Fruit Drop and 'June Drop'

Often the first drop of apples and pears happens shortly after flowering when the fruitlets are pea sized. This is usually as a result of incomplete pollination due to a cold wet spring when there are few pollinating insects around, or when fruit is being grown under glass and the pollinating insects are prevented from reaching the flowers. In greenhouses and polytunnels this can be avoided by hand pollination which should be undertaken daily, when the flowers are fully open. The pollen is best transferred from the anther to the stigmas with the aid of a soft artist's brush, a cotton wool bud or a rabbit's tail.

From June until mid July a more major shedding of healthy fruitlets is often noticed, this is known as the 'June Drop'. This natural shedding may look alarming but is usually beneficial as a heavy set must be thinned anyway to discourage biennial bearing, however, in some years the 'June drop' is unusually heavy with only a sparse crop remaining.

There are several reasons for a large 'June drop'. Trees rely on photosynthesis to produce carbohydrates for energy. It has been discovered that 'June drop' is worse in poor springs when day time temperatures are low and the weather overcast, because until the trees leaves are fully opened allowing photosynthesis, there is a lack of carbohydrates being produced, which results in lower energy levels and a greater loss of fruit. Newly planted trees will often shed most of their fruit because their energies are going into root and shoot production, this is nature's way of making sure that the young trees are not overburdened. Frost damage, irregular water supplies, starvation and overcrowding can also cause an exceptionally large 'June drop'.

Little can be done to prevent 'June drop' however the following measures may help-

- Apply a balanced general fertilizer each spring before bud burst such as Ken Muir's '**Fruit Tree, Cane, Vine & Bush Feed**', 'Growmore' or 'Vitax Q4', being careful to adhere to the manufacturers recommended application rates as overfeeding with too much nitrogen can itself cause fruit loss. (Ken Muir's 'Fruit Tree, Cane, Vine & Bush Feed' is available by calling 01255 830181 or by visiting [www.kenmuir.co.uk](http://www.kenmuir.co.uk)).
- Ensure that trees are watered regularly and mulched to help them conserve moisture in the spring.
- If severe June drop is a problem each year then pruning to allow more light into the centre of the tree in order to ripen wood and encourage fruit bud production may help.
- Fruits can also fall as a result of insect damage. It is therefore important to look for grubs in fallen apples, pears and plums, and if a problem is identified, take the necessary steps to prevent an infestation the following year. The larvae of the apple sawfly, pear midge and plum sawfly are all common pests that will cause fruits to fall to the ground before maturity.