



Biennial Bearing

Biennial bearing (cropping heavily one season and then very lightly the next) is a common problem with apples and pears. Certain varieties such as 'Bramley's Seedling', 'Blenheim Orange', 'Laxton's Superb' and 'Egremont Russet' are prone to it, however, nearly all varieties can fall into this habit if not watered, fed or thinned. Frost destroying the blossom one spring can also sometimes initiate biennial bearing, so consideration should be given when initially choosing a planting position to ensure, where possible, that trees are given a sheltered sunny site away from frost pockets. Protecting small or wall trained trees with fleece in the spring is also advisable.

CONTROL

Once a tree gets into the rhythm of biennial bearing, it is difficult to correct, although certain methods can be adopted to try and improve the situation.

In early spring before an expected heavy crop, half to three-quarters of the fruit buds should be rubbed off the spurs, leaving one or two per spur. This reduces the burden of too heavy a crop in that year, and should enable the tree to develop fruit buds for the next year. At the same time, a policy of more generous feeding and watering must be adopted and applying a mulch around the tree after blossom to help conserve moisture will also help.

If bud rubbing fails to work, an alternative technique is to induce the tree to crop biennially over half the tree by removing half the blossom. Alternate branches are selected - half are chosen to crop in the even years and half in the odd years. Each spring, those branches selected not to crop in that particular year should be de-blossomed. After the third or fourth year the branches should accept this alternate pattern and little blossom removal will be necessary. As with bud rubbing, generous feeding and watering and mulching is recommended.