



Cherry Run-Off

Premature abscission of sweet cherry (also known as cherry run-off or cherry drop) is a common problem in the U.K. and can sometimes devastate the entire crop.

There is still much to learn about what exactly causes cherry run-off and how to prevent it, however recent research has shown that it is more likely to occur after a cold spring when the weather has been dull, especially around blossom time and low temperatures continue during the early stages of fruit development. Cold, wet weather conditions the previous autumn also play a part as trees need to build up energy reserves (food) through photosynthesis to support fruit growth early the following spring. It is thought that reduced photosynthesis brought about by low light intensity during these periods could cause a hormone imbalance that results in fruit drop.

DAMAGE

After flowering, the fruits begin to set, but when they get to the size of a pea, they dry up, drop off and are inedible.

CONTROL

To maximise photosynthesis prune the trees to keep an open canopy so light can get to as many leaves as possible. This pruning should be done during the summer months. Early thinning of fruitlets in spring may also help.

Fruit thinning to allow no more than 10 fruitlets per spur, is thought to help reduce this problem and should be done when the young fruitlets are less than 5mm (1/4in) in size.

Trees planted under glass are not usually affected and trees trained against south facing walls appear to be less susceptible. Applying a light reflecting mulch such as a pale woodchip underneath trees may also help.

Some of the new sweet cherry varieties bred in the U.K (such as Penny and Summer Sun) appear to be less prone to this problem, cropping well even in years when run-off has been severe in some of the Canadian self-fertile varieties.