



## Stonefruit

*Daryl King, Senior Technical Officer, DPIFM Alice Springs*

**Site Selection:** A north to north-easterly aspect will maximise sunlight. Provide protection from winds.

**Ground Preparation:** Soil should preferably be sandy-loam, with a pH of 6.0–7.5. Poor drainage can lead to waterlogging, root disease and reduced vigour.

Traditionally trees should be at 5 m spacings while rows should be 6 m apart. Spacings may however vary depending upon stonefruit type and training method.

**Planting Material:** Low chill varieties are best suited to Central Australian conditions. Rootstocks should have nematode resistance, tolerance to high soil temperatures and high pH.

**Irrigation:** Young trees should get approximately 30 L/week during winter and 90 L/week over summer.

Mature fruit bearing trees (4-5 years old) will require approximately 65 L/week in winter and 400 L/week in summer. These rates may vary depending on the irrigation system used, e.g. hand watering, drip line etc.

**Nutrition:** Trees will generally require applications of complete fertiliser at least once per year and foliar sprays (liquid micronutrients mixed with water) 4-5 times per growing season.

Foliar sprays and fertiliser mixtures should contain nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, manganese, copper and zinc elements.

Water should be applied to the tree roots to avoid salt build up.

**Pests:** In Central Australia, pest damage is minimal with fruit fly, thrips and birds (ringnecks) the main concerns.

**Diseases:** Bacteria and fungal disease are of minimal concern.

**Tree Management:** Home garden peach and nectarine trees are best shaped in a vase or open centred pruning style with six well-spaced main limbs giving ample light and encouraging strong fruiting wood.

Apricot trees should be lightly pruned with multiple main and secondary limbs.

Peach and nectarine trees usually bear fruit on one-year-old wood, while plums and apricots bear fruit on one-year-old wood and spurs.

Thinning will reduce the number of fruit on the tree. If trees are not thinned a large number of small fruit will be produced. This can also result in smaller crops and uneven bearing in following years.

**Harvest:** Peaches and nectarines will provide fruit in their second year. Apricots mature after three to four years. Harvest in Central Australia is from October through to December.

DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY  
INDUSTRY, FISHERIES AND MINES

Crops, Forestry and  
Horticulture Division

GPO Box 3000

Darwin NT 0801

Tel: 08 8999 2357

Fax: 08 8999 2049

Email: horticulture@nt.gov.au

Web: www.nt.gov.au/dpifm

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