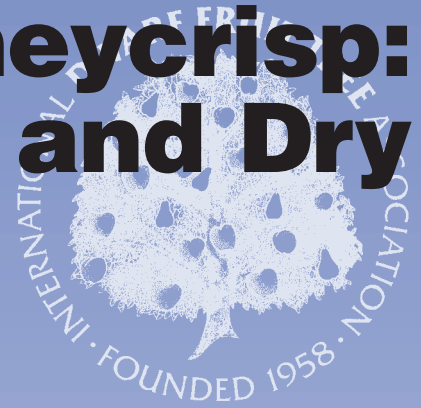


Honeycrisp: Hot and Dry



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Statements within trade journals in the past couple of years suggest that quality Honeycrisp apples cannot be grown in climates perceived as hot. Our orchard is located in one of those perceived climates in the semi-arid (6 inches precipitation per year), low elevation (600 ft) area of southcentral Washington. The orchard is located near the Yakima River near the town of Prosser. Daily high temperatures during the summer often range between 80 and 105°F; the low is usually between 45 and 70°F. This is a dry climate. The relative humidity is nearly always low.

Despite the above-mentioned perceptions by others, Honeycrisp is doing well in Prosser. Although there are claims to the contrary, Honeycrisp is relatively sunburn tolerant. All apples can become sunburned, some are worse than others. Honeycrisp, in our experience, is not nearly as susceptible as some. It does require plenty of water on a hot summer day to help prevent sunburn. We have found it better to apply that water under tree rather than through overtree cooling. We have too much cracking from overtree cooling, and the fruit seemed a bit "bleached out."

The challenges we have experienced with Honeycrisp include bitter pit, alternate bearing, cracking, low vigor, stem and calyx bowl etching, birds, preharvest drop and brittle unions. Of these, bitter pit has been our prominent concern. It, in combination with alternate bearing and low vigor, creates a vicious cycle with which to deal. We are presently amending the soil and applying calcium in a variety of manners to control bitter pit. These methods worked well during the past growing season. We are working to improve tree vigor to help alleviate problems with alternate

bearing, which is also being combated with blossom thinning.

Although there are definite challenges to raising Honeycrisp at our site, excellent quality fruit is coming from the orchard. The first trees on M.7 rootstocks were planted in 1993. In 1999 we finished planting the orchard, a total of 4 acres. The orchard is somewhat of a test block for Honeycrisp. Trees are planted on M.7, M.26, M.9, Mark and B.9 and are trained to single row 3- or 1-wire trellises, a double row 3-wire trellis, a 3-row bed with a single wire for each row and in a Tatura-type system.

We harvest the fruit as it develops color and when it tastes good, which usually means having a brix of about 15%. The starch iodine has not been helpful for determining optimal time for harvest. Most of the starch seems to disappear before the flavor appears. We clip the stems to help prevent skin punctures in the harvest bin. The fruit is packed at a growers' cooperative packing shed and usually picked up there by the purchasing company.

We marketed Honeycrisp fruit for the first time in 1997. Our markets include Minneapolis and the Pacific Northwest. In previous years our pack-out percentage was very low. This year the fruit graded well and 80% of it was packed. Every year the quality of the packed fruit has been excellent. Consumers in the Pacific Northwest continue to ask for more and our customer in Minneapolis, who is a fruit distributor there, claims they are as good or better than the product he is getting from the Midwest.

So, Honeycrisp can be grown effectively where it is hot and dry, at least as hot and dry as it is at our site. It may be a challenge, but it can and will continue to be done.

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