

# Disaster Relief

## *Recovering Small Fruits*

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Storms damage small fruits in different ways, depending on how the crop grows and how near the storm hits to the crop. Wind and too much water can hurt crops.

Here are some suggestions for evaluating damage and making repairs:

- Where wind damage is heavy, prune as lightly as possible. But if large areas of cambium are exposed, the plant probably will not survive without attention. Make clean cuts to minimize the exposed cambium area. If the plant can be saved, several growing seasons may be needed to retrain.
- You can reset many plants that are leaning or uprooted if the root ball is intact. Once you reset the plants, secure them with stakes to immobilize them.
- Reshape altered dikes, terraces or raised planting beds to protect the area; cover exposed roots or provide a medium for new root growth. Use the smallest equipment possible to lessen compaction and reduce further root damage.
- You can secure strawberry plants within 10 days after the storm, but you will have to replant most plasticulture plantings. The cost of replanting is fairly small compared to irrigation, plastic mulch, and fumigation.

Premature defoliation caused by heavy wind weakens fruits. Defoliation, along with root damage, causes additional stress because the root system stores carbohydrates the leaves make. This supplies energy. Without it, the plants may appear saved in the short run, only to be killed in winter.

Once you have pruned out the top damage and after the first freeze, apply nitrogen in a complete fertilizer at the rate of 30 pounds actual N per acre. This helps the plant start new root growth, which continues in winter as long as the soil temperature is above 45 °F.

Soil concentrations of 3,000 ppm soluble salt make fruit culture very difficult. Some fruits tolerate salt better than others. Grapes, figs, pomegranates, and pecans are examples of fruits that will not be hurt by increased salt concentrations as readily as blueberries, strawberries, and blackberries.

If the soil salt concentration is high, irrigate frequently to help reduce the buildup of salt after evaporation.

Test all irrigation water for salinity. If irrigation ponds have been contaminated, pump them out and fill with clean river or well water. Rainfall, while complicating other cleanup activities, helps flush the soil.

If the sodium content is 250 ppm or more, internal drainage problems will occur. You can correct this somewhat by using gypsum as a soil additive. Apply at the rate of 2 ounces of gypsum per square foot of area (2¾ tons per acre) and immediately irrigate to move the material into the soil profile.

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