

Apple and Pear Crop Load Management John Cline, Tree Fruit Physiology University of Guelph

Learning Objectives

- Crop load management and abscission (fruit drop)
- Why and when to thin
- Precision thinning
- Available chemical thinners and overview of how they work
- Factors that affect thinning variability
- Thinning with Accede®
- Chemical thinners for pears



What is Crop Load Management?



Jonagold trees with excessive fruit

The process of reducing the fruit number to an acceptable level (*thinning*)

Builds upon *the natural process* that occurs in the tree



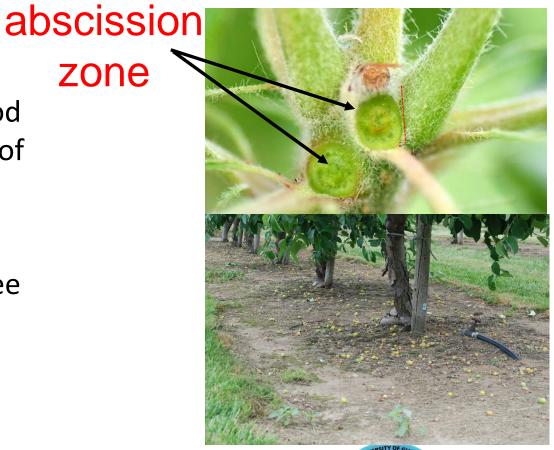
Underlying physiology of fruitlet abscission

Natural Fruit Abscission

- 'June drop' represents the period of <u>natural</u> abscission (shedding of fruits)
- Abscission is an internal mechanism regulated by the tree

Fruitlet thinners

<u>Enhance</u> earlier fruit drop -> augmenting the natural process





The shift toward hedgerow orchard systems provides new crop load management opportunities

Free-standing low density, globular

Higher density spindle, narrow canopy widths





Target fruit size calculator

	Imperial		Metric	
Target Vield	1000	bu/acre	51.8	t/ha
Target Yield				-
Bins	50	bins/acre	124	bins/ha
Row Spacing	13.13	ft	4.00	m
Tree Spacing	4.1	ft	1.25	m
Density	809	trees/acre	2000	trees/ha
Yield	1.24	bu/tree	1.24	bu/tree
Yield	52	lbs/tree	23.6	kg/tree
	Minimur	n Diameter	Target	
Count Size	(in)	(mm)	Fruit per Tree	
196	21/4	57.0	242	Cee grade
150				
175	2⅔	60.0	216	-
		60.0 64.0		-
175	2⅔		216	-
175 163	2¾ 2½	64.0	216 201	-
175 163 150	2⅔ 2½ 25%	64.0 67.0	216 201 185	-
175 163 150 138	2¾ 2½ 2½ 2¾	64.0 67.0 70.0	216 201 185 170	-
175 163 150 138 125 113	2 ³ / ₈ 2 ¹ / ₂ 2 ⁵ / ₈ 2 ³ / ₄ 2 ⁷ / ₈	64.0 67.0 70.0 73.0	216 201 185 170 154	-
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175 163 150 138 125 113 100	23/8 21/2 25/8 23/4 23/4 23/8 3 31/8	64.0 67.0 70.0 73.0 76.0 79.0	216 201 185 170 154 140 124	-
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175 163 150 138 125 113 100 88 80	23% 2½ 25% 2¾ 2¾ 2% 3 3 3½ 3¼ 3¾ 3¾	64.0 67.0 70.0 73.0 76.0 79.0 83.0 84.5	216 201 185 170 154 140 124 109 99	-
175 163 150 138 125 113 100 88 80 72	23% 21/2 25% 23/4 27% 3 3 31/2 31/2	64.0 67.0 70.0 73.0 76.0 79.0 83.0 84.5 89.0	216 201 185 170 154 140 124 109 99 89	Cee grade



Optimizing Crop Value

The number of fruit that remain on the tree directly affects:

- yield
- fruit size

Crop Value

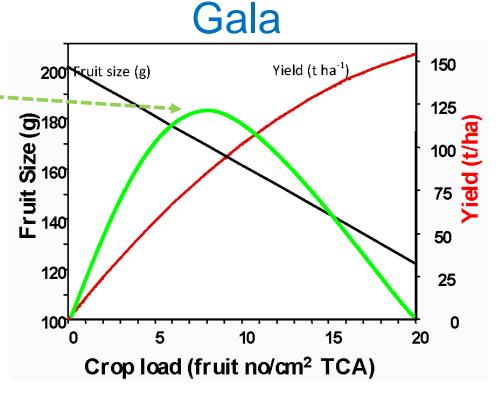
- Colour
- Fruit quality
- Return bloom

Calculations of crop value at various crop load levels have shown that at very high crop loads, yield is very high but fruit size and crop value are low (Robinson, 2013)

When crop load is reduced to more moderate levels through thinning, then crop value rises dramatically even though yield is lower because fruit size is larger and has greater value.

At some point crop value peaks when yield and fruit size are balanced and then with further reductions in crop load, crop value declines due to the lower yield not being fully compensated by larger fruit size

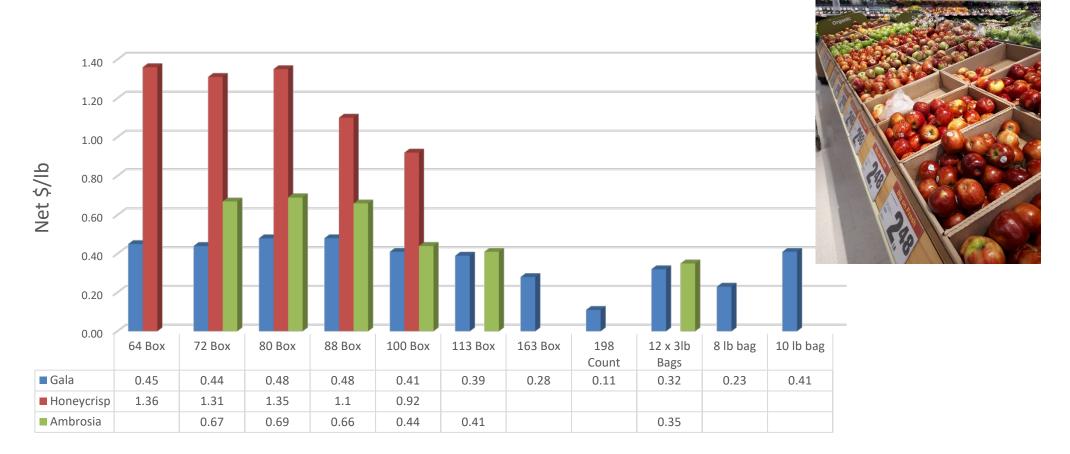
Managing crop load is a balancing act between reducing crop load (yield) sufficiently to achieve optimum fruit size and adequate return bloom without reducing yield excessively (Robinson et al., 2014).



Robinson et al. 2016



Details of net returns are required to determine target fruit size

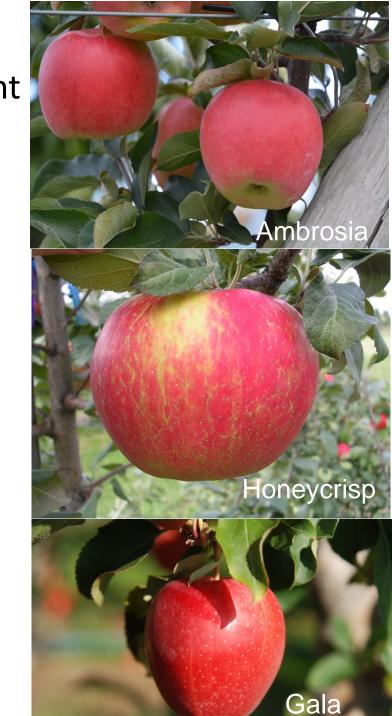


Example of \$/lb in relation to fruit size

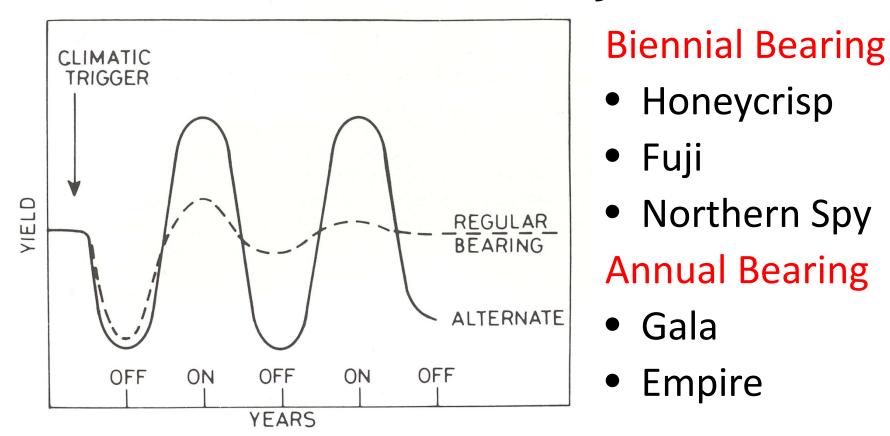


Why is Crop Load Management Important

- Apples trees bear an overabundance of flowers
- Thinning (reducing crop load) is necessary to enhance fruit size and quality at harvest
- Early chemical thinning is important to reduce labour costs of hand thinning and optimize fruit quality
- Labour availability and cost are significant growing concerns



Biennial Bearing-justification alone for thinning



Schematic diagram showing differences in cropping on a regular and alternating cropping year. The off year can be caused by a climatic trigger such as frost, poor pollination, or hormonal imbalance the previous year. After Monselise and Goldschmidt, 1982.



Benefits of a successful thinning program Reduced Biennial Bearing

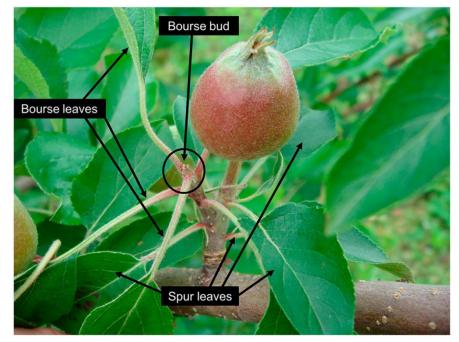
For biennial bearing cultivars:

-reduce the crop load early to avoid less bloom the following year



Why thin early?

- Flowers begin to develop one year prior to bloom (June)
- Many factors within the tree determine if the bud will become floral or remain vegetative

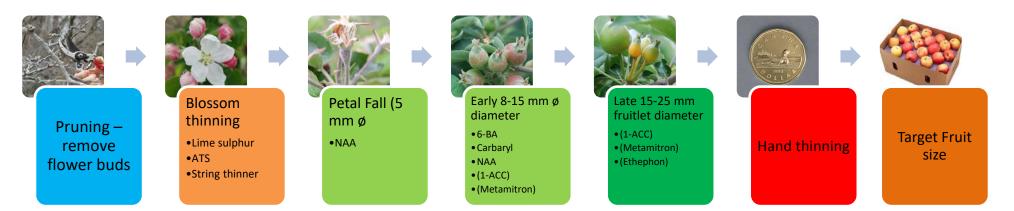




Hand Thinning – Least Desirable Also, least effective for return bloom and final fruit size at harvest



Precision thinning



Precision thinning is the orchard management process of using <u>multiple</u> strategies to reach a target crop load with minimal need for hand-thinning



Precision Pruning

Reduce the bud load to 1.5-2.0 times the target bud load, assuming a set of one fruit per flower bud.

Example, if the target fruit number is 100 fruits per tree, prune to leave 150 to 200 flower buds per tree





Precision Crop Load Management

Blossom and fruitlet thinning

 Apply sequential chemical thinning sprays and assess response after each spray (full bloom – 20 mm fruit diameter)

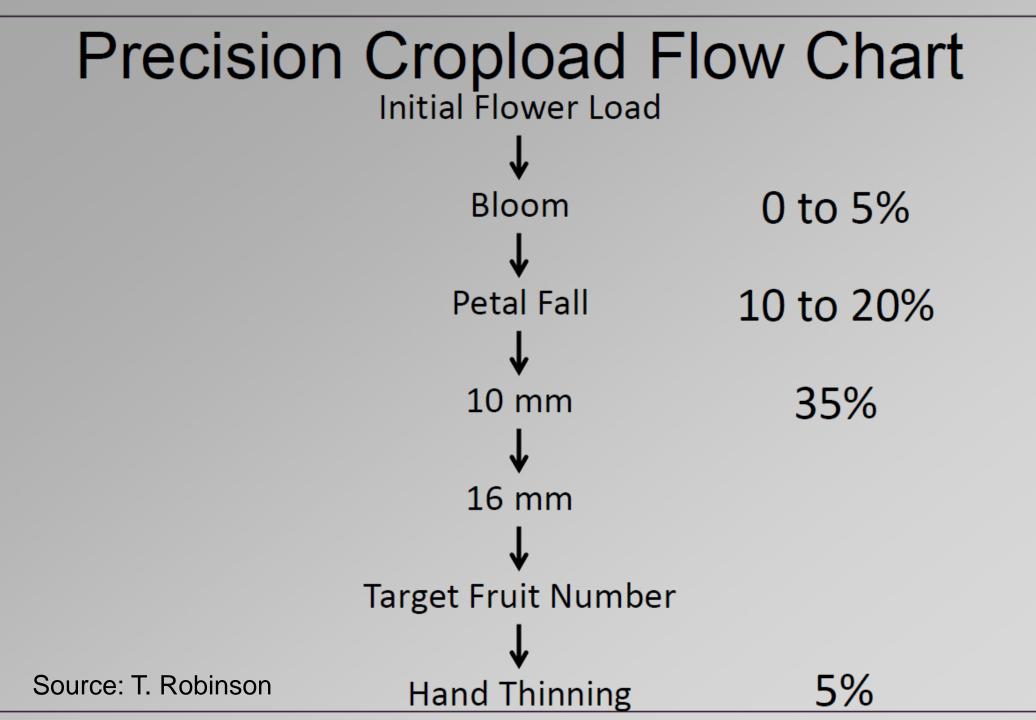
Hand thinning

• reduce final fruit number to the target fruit number



Steps in Precision Thinning (after Robinson)

Prediction Models	Initial Flower Load	Timing
Pollen Tube Growth Model	1.Blossom Thinning	60% full bloom
Carbohydrate model, fruit growth rate model	2. Petal Fall	6-7 mm
	¥	
Carbohydrate model, fruit growth rate model, (BreviSmart)	3. 10-15 mm	10-15
	↓	
Carbohydrate model	4. 16-20 mm	16-20 mm
	5. Hand thinning	After June drop (25-30 mm)



Action Steps for Precision Crop Load Management

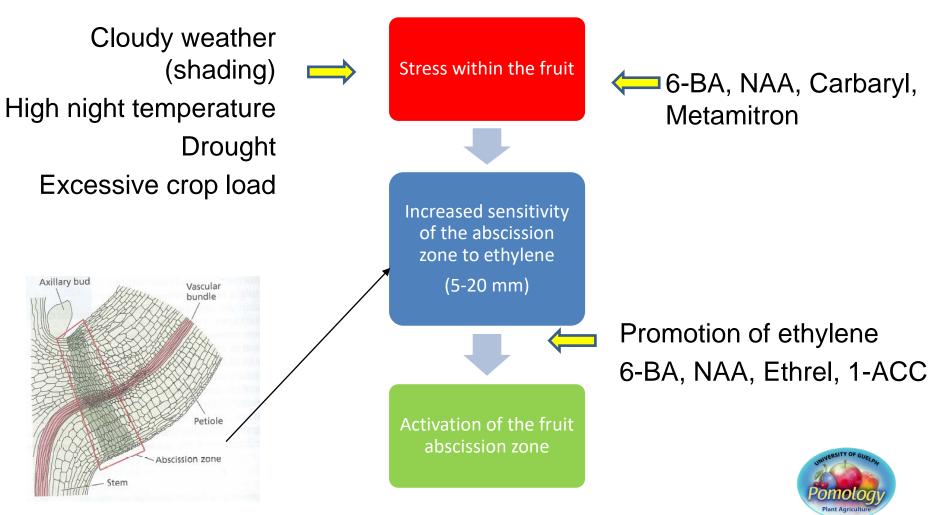
- 1. Set the desired target crop load number of fruit per tree
- 2. Dormant prune to 1.5-2.0x bud load
- 3. Start blossom and chemical thinning early
- 4. Use models to predict fruit set
- 5. Repeat chemical fruitlet thinning sprays as needed (and according to label and efficacy)
- 6. Hand thin



Chemical Thinner Options

Blossom Thinners	Fruitlet Thinners	Future Products
Lime-Sulphur (tanked mixed with) mineral oil	Carbaryl - Sevin XLR (carbamate insecticide)	Metamitron (Brevis)
Ammonium thiosulphate (12-0-0-26S)	6-BA (MaxCel, Cilis Plus) – Cytokinin	
NAA – Fruitone, Refine	NAA – (Fruitone-N/L, Maintain)	
NAD – Amid-Thin	ACC (Accede [®]), Valent BioSciences	
20	The list of formulated commercial products is not complete. Other product manufacturers may be available in the USA.	Pomology Plant Agriculture

Physiology



Abscission zone of a leaf

Reasons for thinning variability

Table 1. A summary of the key features of fruit trees that are either easy or difficult tothin (after Williams 1979; Williams and Edgerton 1981).

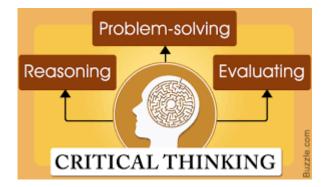
1.	Fruit spurs on the lower, shaded
	inside branches are low in vigor

Trees are easy to thin when:

- 2. Moisture and nitrogen supply are inadequate.
- 3. Root systems are weakened by disease or physical damage.
- 4. Bloom is heavy, especially after previous heavy crops.
- 5. Young trees have many vigorous upright branches.
- 6. Thinners are applied to self-pollinated or poorly pollinated fruits.
- 7. Fruit set is heavy on easily thinned cultivars such as 'Delicious'.
- 8. Cultivars tend to have a naturally heavy June drop.
- 9. Fruit sets in clusters rather than as singles.
- 10. Bloom period is short, and blossomthinning sprays are used.
- 11. High temperature is accompanied by high humidity before or after spraying.
- 12. Blossoms and young leaves are injured by frost before or soon after spray application.
- 13. Foliage is conditioned for increased (chemical absorption by prolonged cool) (periods.)
- 14. Rain occurs before or after spray application.
- 15. Prolonged cloudy periods reduce photosynthesis before or after application of chemicals.

Trees are difficult to thin when:

- 1. Fruit set on spurs in well-lit areas of tree (tops and outer periphery).
- 2. Trees are in good vigor with no mineral deficiencies.
- 3. Older trees in good vigor have a mature bearing habit.
- 4. Light bloom or light fruit set occurs with the exception of young trees.
- 5. Trees have horizontal fruiting branches.
- 6. Insects are active on cross-pollinated cultivars.
- 7. Limbs and spurs have been slightly girdled following moderate winter injury.
- 8. Biennial bearing trees are in the off year.
- 9. Fruit sets in singles rather than in clusters.
- 10. Cultivars such as 'Golden Delicious' and heavy-setting spur types are to be thinned.
- 11. When ideal fruit growth occurs before and after time of thinning.
- 12. Low humidity causes rapid drying, and decreased absorption occurs before and after spraying.
- 13. Cool periods follow bloom without any tree stress.
- 14. Endogenous ethylene production is low.
- 15. Bloom is light, and a high leaf-tofruit ratio exists.



Weather is a key component (temperatures, rain, solar radiation)



Some important factors that promote and supress the response to chemical thinners

Promoters

- Lower light conditions
- Heavy bloom
- Cuticles of leaves formed under cooler periods lead to greater absorption of chemicals
- Higher night temperatures
- Fruit set in clusters rather than singles

<u>Suppressors</u>

- Lower temperatures reduced plant metabolism and activity
- Light bloom
- Highly tree vigour leading to maximal fruit growth before and after thinner application
- Biennial bearing trees in their 'off' year
- Less differentiation in size between the central fruit (king) and lateral fruit



Apple fruitlets developing from a cluster – about 10 days after bloom

Thinning Models/Tools

Model/Tool	Input	Output	Comments
Fruit Growth Model (Greene)	Fruit diameter	A predication of the final number of fruit that will remain after thinning	Very accurate Time consuming Difficult to implement with large acreage
Carbohydrate Model (Malusim) (Laskso and Robinson)	Amount of bloom, temperature, solar radiation	Timing and efficacy of thinners – adjustment in the rate of chemical thinner	Requires local weather and weather forecasts Not available in Canada
Pollen Tube Growth Model (Yoder and Peck)	Style length, temperature	Best time to apply blossom thinners	Requires local weather Not available in Canada
BreviSmart (Adama)	Temperature, fruit diameter, cultivar, past and forecasted weather	Timing and efficacy of Brevis - adjustment in the rate of chemical thinner	Requires local weather and weather forecasts (not currently available in Canada 25

Cornell Apple Carbohydrate Thinning Model

- Web-based (newa.cornell.edu) and mobile version (MaluSim.org) are available in the USA
- The model uses sunlight and temperature to estimate carbohydrate availability for fruit growth
- Thinning efficacy for any given spray uses a carbohydrate balance 2 days before and 4 days after the spray
- Output: Provides a recommendation on:

i) whether to thin

ii) <u>adjustment</u> in chemical thinning rate +/- 30%

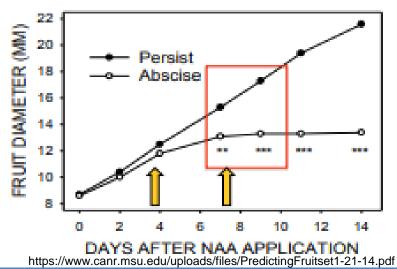




Fruit Growth Rate Model

Basic assumption/hypothesis

Fruitlet fate	Prediction
Persist	A fruit is predicted to persist if the growth rate over the measurement period was at least 50% or greater of the fastest growing fruit.
Abscise (drop)	A fruit is predicted to abscise if the growth rate of the fruit slowed to 50% or less of the growth rate of the fastest growing fruit.

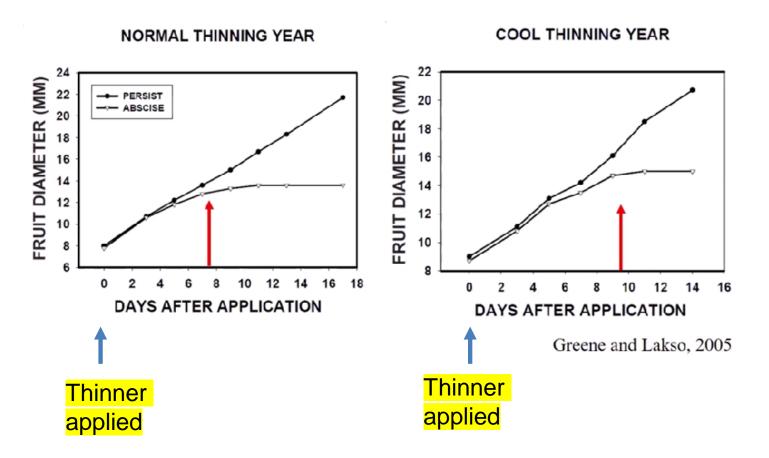


Abscising fruit slow down growth in 3-4 days days and stop growth within a 4-6 days following a thinning application.

This slowing of growth is temperature dependent Two measurements usually will suffice to predict set.

The first diameter measurement should be performed <u>three days after the time of a thinning</u> <u>application</u> and no earlier than the 6 mm stage. The second diameter measurement should be performed three to four days later as indicated above

Fruit set prediction based on actual data (Greene and Lakso, 2005)



Slowing of fruit growth (that precedes abscission) can be detected 7 to 10 days after thinner application (weather dependent)

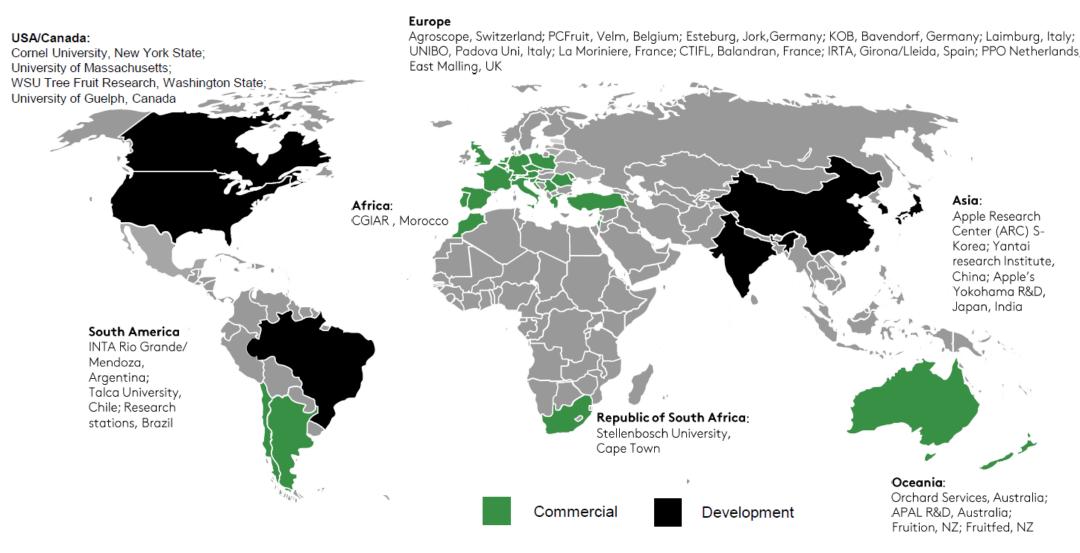


New Fruitlet Thinners (not OMRE approved)

Product	Company	Mode	Ideal Timing	Status
Brevis (metamitron)	Adama Agricultural Solutions	Photosynthesis inhibitor	Petal fall – 20 or 25 mm	Product launch 2024 likely Currently registered in other countries (Australia, Israel, New Zealand, Chile, Argentina, parts Europe, S. Africa)
1-ACC (Accede)	Valent BioSciences	Stimulates ethylene	Petal fall – 20 or 25 mm	Approved in Canada and the USA



Metamitron (Brevis[™] status globally (as of 2021) Source: Ton Bresseling, ADAMA



Accede[®] for Thinning Apples

Accede Label states:

- Apply at 200-400 ppm
- Timing: from full bloom until the average diameter of the king fruitlets is 25 mm.
- Accede SG is most active when king fruitlet diameter is 15-20 mm.

Our own research findings

Has not thinned adequately in several studies conducted on Ambrosia and Gala, particularly at 20 mm fruitlet diameter.

It is recommended to apply other thinning products separately or in combination with Accede[®] for effective thinning.



Metamitron for Thinning Apples

- Apply at 1.8 L/ha (base rate)
- Adjust rates using BreviSmart computer model
- Timing: petal fall to 20 mm
- Wait approx. 8 days for second applications
- A non-ionic surfactant may increase thinning efficacy

What has our research shown?

Metamitron is an effective thinner Most effective when king fruitlet diameter is 8-15 mm Thinning response is linear with increasing concentration Generally, rate above 1.8L/ha are required



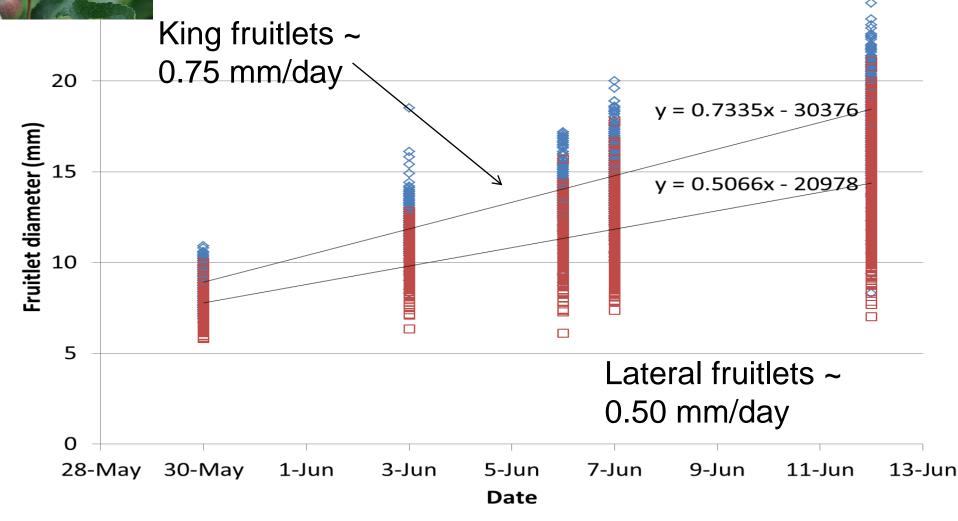
Steps for Successful Thinning General Key Learnings

- Applications will be most effective when the maximum temperature on the day of application and for the following 2-3 days are ~20°C (68°F) or higher.
- Apply tree row volume dilute
- Use the appropriate product and rate (check grower recommendation guides)
- Spray upper 2/3 of the tree if fruit set is poor in the lower canopy
- Use a non ionic surfactant such as Agral 90 (0.05-0.10% by volume)
- When hand thinning, leave only one fruit per flower cluster
- 50% of the spurs need to be resting (no fruit) to have good return flowering
- Fruit are most sensitive to chemical thinners when 8-15 mm fruitlet diameter
- Its better to slightly over-thin than to under-thin.

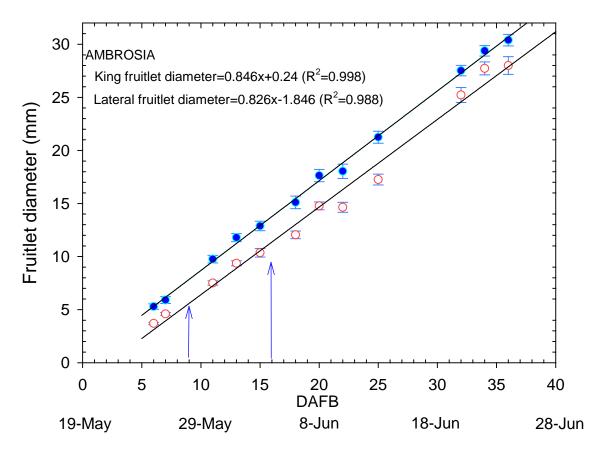




Gala king and lateral fruitlet growth (2013)



2022 Ambrosia Fruit Growth Rates Simcoe, ON





Growth rates

King fruitlets: 0.75-1 mm/day Lateral fruits: slightly low rate Thinning window 5 (PF)-15 mm

King fruit mm/day	Thinning window (days)
0.75	13
0.85	12
1.0	10



It takes 12-14 days to visually see fruit drop after applying a chemical thinner

Cultivar Sensitivity to Chemical Fruitlet Thinners

Easy	Moderate	Difficult
Ambrosia	Empire	Golden Delicious
non-spur Red Delicious	McIntosh	Paulared
Idared	Northern Spy	Gala strains
Mutsu/Crispin	Cortland	Fuji
Jonagold strains		Goldrush
Jerseymac		Spartan
Honeycrisp		Wealthy
Gingergold		spur-type McIntosh
Silken		spur-type Red Delicious.
Creston		
Cameo		
Golden Supreme		

Source: http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/hort/thinning.htm#apples



Thinning with 6-BA and Carbaryl

Desired response	Concentration of 6-BA (ppm) ²	Concentration of carbaryl (ppm) ²	Number of applications	MaxCel (L/1,000 L water/ha)	Cilis Plus (L/1,000 L water/ha)	Amount of Sevin XLR (L/1,000 L water/ha)
Enhance size only ^{3,4}	10-50	-	2 to 4	0.5-2.65	0.5-2.5	-
Mild thinning and sizing	50-75	-	1 to 2	2.65-3.95	2.5-3.75	-
Moderate	75-100	-	1 to 2	3.95-5.3	3.75-5.05	-
thinning and sizing	50-75	500	1 to 2	2.65-3.95	2.5-3.75	1
Aggressive	100-150	-	1 to 2	5.3-7.95	5.05-7.55	-
thinning and sizing	75-100	500-1,000	1 to 2	3.95-5.3	3.75-5.05	1-2
Very aggressive thinning	150-200	-	1 to 2	7.95- 10.65	7.55-10.1	-
and sizing	100-125	1,000	1 to 2	5.3-6.6	5.05-6.3	2

Table 3. Suggested Rates of MaxCel or Cilis Plus to Use With or Without Sevin XLR



http://omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/hort/thinning.htm#apples

Thinning recommendations by cultivar

3. Crop Protection

HINNING

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Cultivar	Sevin XLR (L/1,000 L water) ²	Fruitone-L (NAA) (ppm) ³	Sevin XLR (/1,000 L water) + Fruitone-L (NAA) (ppm) ^{2,3}	MaxCel or Cilis Plus (g BA/ha)4	Sevin XLR (L/1,000 L water) + MaxCel or Cilis Plus (g BA/ha) ^{2,3,4}
Fuji	-	3.6-9.7	1-1.5 + 10-12	100-150	1-2 + 50-75
Gala	-	2.4-9.7	1 + 5-10	75-100	1-2 + 50
Gingergold	1-1.5	2.4-9.7	1+2.5-5	75	1 + 50
Golden Delicious, Wealthy	1-2	3.6-9.7	1+5-10	75-100	1-2 + 50
Golden Supreme	1	2.4-9.7	-	-	-
Goldrush	-	-	1 + 10	-	-
Honeycrisp	1-1.5	2.4-9.7	1+2.5	-	-
Idared	-	1.2-7.3	-	50-75	-
Jerseymac	1-1.5	2.4-9.7	-	-	-
Jonagold	1-1.5	2.4-9.7	-	50-75	-
Jonamac	-	3.6-9.7	-	-	-
Lodi	-	3.6-9.7	1 + 10-15	-	-
Macoun	-	3.6-9.7	-	-	-
McIntosh, Early	-	3.6-9.7	1+5-105	50-75	-
McIntosh, Non-spur	1-2	1.2-7.3	-	50	-
McIntosh, Spur-type	-	1.2-7.3	1-2 + 2.5-5	50-75	1+50
Northern Spy	0.5-1.5	1.2-7.3	-	-	-
Paulared	1-1.5	3.6-9.7	1 + 10-15	75	1+50
Red Delicious	0.5-1.5	1.2-7.3	-	-	-
Red Delicious, Spur-type	-	1.2-7.3	1-2 + 5-10	-	-
Silken	1-1.5	-	-	_	-
Spartan, Russets	1-2	2.4-9.7	1 + 10-15	-	-

- = Treatment information not available.

¹ These rates are suggested for trees with a settled cropping history. Chemically thinning a first crop tree or immature trees is considered very risky.

² Sevin XLR is 43% active ingredient and contains 480 g or approximately 0.5 kg of carbaryl per litre. 1 L of Sevin XLR is roughly equivalent to 1 kg of Sevin 50 W.

³ Sufficient water volumes must be used to thoroughly wet trees. For actual amount of NAA, refer to the label.

⁴ Consult Table 3–14. Suggested Rates of MaxCel or Cilis Plus to Use With or Without Sevin XLR to determine the actual ppm benzyladenine (BA) being applied. Concentration of BA should be no less than 50 ppm to be effective.

5 At petal fall

Table developed by John Cline, University of Guelph.

http://omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/pub360/pub360A.pdf

Pear Thinning

Goals of thinning

- Reduce fruit set to minimize the amount of hand thinning
- Improve size and quality at harvest
- promote return bloom to encourage annual cropping. lacksquare

Many pear varieties largely <u>self-regulate</u> their crops without chemical intervention, but well-managed chemical and hand thinning programs can increase the long-term profitability of some varieties including Bartlett.

Fruit set in some pear blocks can be low and it may be advisable to clearly assess pear set before applying chemical thinners, especially when conditions have been cool and/or wet during bloom leading to poor fruit set.



Chemical Fruitlet Thinners for Pear in the USA



Active ingredient	Formulated products	Rates	Timing	Notes
1-naphthalene- acetamide (NAD)	Amid-Thin W	10-50 ppm (cultivar dependent)	Full bloom or within 7 days after petal fall	Apply when temperatures are 70-75°C. Do not apply below 60°F or above 80°F
1-naphthalene-acetic acid (NAA),	Refine [®] , PoMaxa [®]	10-15 ppm ideal. Can be applied early but will likely be less effective	10-15 mm fruit diameter	Apply when temperatures are 70-75°C. Do not apply below 60°F or above 80°F
6-BA	MaxCel [®] , exilis [®]	75-200 ppm	5-15 mm king fruit diameter (8-12 mm ideal)	Apply when the maximum temperature is above 65°C the day of application and the following 2-3 days.
ABA	Protone [®] (Organic)	100-500 ppm	5-20 mm fruit diameter	Apply within 2-3 days of significant cloud cover and/or 2-3 days of mid- 70s°F. Do not apply above 85°F. May cause leaf yellowing and leaf drop



Research Orchards

Bosc

Niagara on the Lake Four year old trees (planted 2011) OHFx87 rootstock Spacing In row :0.91 m Between row: 3.65 m Density: 3011 trees/ha Irrigated: overhead Training system: 3-wire trellis



Cold Snap™

St. David's, ON Four year old trees (planted 2011) OHFx87 rootstock Spacing In row :0.91 m Between row: 3.65 m Density: 3663 trees/ha Irrigated: overhead Training system: 3-wire trellis



Fruitlet chemical thinning treatments

Only Cilis Plus/MaxCel registered in Canada

Treatments

Details

- 1. Untreated Control
- 2. Hand-thinned
- 3. 75 mg/L 6-BA*
- 4. 150 mg/L 6-BA*
- 5. 10 mg/L NAA Fruitone L
- 6. 20 mg/L NAA Fruitone L
- 7. 150 mg/L S-ABA (Protone)
- 8. 300 mg/L S-ABA (Protone)
- 9. 150 mg/L ACC (Accede®)
- 10. 300 mg/L ACC (Accede®)

- Applied 10-12 mm fruitlet diameter
- Final fruit set not fully apparent
- Applied using commercial air blast sprayer
- Tree Row Volume dilute
- 6 Replications
- Single tree plots
- 0.05% Regulaid surfactant included



Summary of Pear Thinning Study Three-Year Study in Ontario



 NRC Research Press
 ARTIC

 Response of Bosc and Cold Snap[™] pears to thinning with

Response of Bosc and Cold Snap[™] pears to thinning with NAA, 6-BA, ACC, and s-ABA J.A. Cline, K. Carter, A. Gunter, C. Bakker, and A.C. Green

- Fruit set was relatively light in this 3-year study and little hand thinning was required <u>Thinning, crop load, fruit per tree</u>
- Bosc and Cold Snap responded similarly to the thinning treatments except for 'Cold Snap' in 2016.
- Overall, all thinning products reduced crop load at least once in the 3-yr study, although this varied by year and cultivar.
- Higher concentrations were more effective than lower concentrations.
- 10 -20 ppm NAA, 150 ppm 6-BA, and 300 pppm s-ABA were the most consistent at thinning
- Applications of 10 or 20 ppm NAA consistently resulted in the lowest fruit set compared to the control
- ACC (Accede[™]) was a inconsistent thinner at the high rate (300 ppm)
- Few differences between the untreated and hand thinned were observed
- Thinning resulted in higher percentages of large sized fruit but decreased yield and crop value.
- No negative effects on fruit quality (maturity, BRIX, firmness, colour) were observed from any of the thinning treatments.



Thinning pears with metamitron

- Metamitron consistently thinned 'Bartlett' at rates of 200-300 ppm when applied between 10 and 15 mm fruitlet diameter (Elsysy et al., 2020).
- Thinning of 'Conference' pear was also optimized between 175 and 300 ppm (Maas et al., 2010).





Improving fruit set of European Pears



- Natural ethylene production of fruitlets occurs 7 to 14 days after bloom (Einhorn, 2020)
- ReTain (AVG) may increase crop load in years when fruit set in lights – due to weather and/or poor pollination.

ReTain[®] (~132 ppm 100 GAL/acre) is labelled to:

- Increase set: apply from white bud stage to full bloom. Do not apply after petal fall.
- Reduce June drop- apply at 10 mm fruitlet diameter

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Acknowledgements

Cathy Baker, Research Technician Mandy Beneff, Research Technician Graduate Students Ontario Apple Growers Ontario Tender Fruit Grower's Assoc. Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance Research Program





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