

one) and dark brown frasis found around the pip of the fruit. Freckle spot (*Fusicladium carpophilum*), bacterial canker (*Pseudomonas syringae*), dieback (*Eutypa armeniaca*) and crown gall (*Agrobacterium tumefaciens*) are the most frequent diseases in the summer rainfall areas. Very little can be done to control these once they occur in the orchard, except for freckle spot on the fruit (which in wet seasons can spoil the exterior of the fruit).



Apricots

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Background

Apricots originate from the North-east of China from there it was distributed throughout central Asia and Asia Minor, and have been cultivated for thousands of years. The Romans introduced apricots to Europe, Greece and Italy in 70 BC. The first apricot trees imported into South Africa arrived during the 17th century and were planted almost exclusively in the Western Cape under winter rainfall conditions.

Climatic and soil requirements

The apricot tree is deciduous and needs a relatively cold winter for proper dormancy and flower bud development (400–600 hours below 7,2 °C during winter). The cultivation of apricots is not suitable in areas with a subtropical climate.

Annual rainfall should be taken into consideration in planning an apricot orchard. Irrigation is essential for apricot trees. Apricot trees need sufficient water for survival and are very susceptible to waterlogged soil. The trees thrive on well-drained loam soils. A minimum soil depth of about 1,5 m is recommended.

Uses

Apricots are used both as a fresh fruit, juice and dried fruit. Some apricots are used for making 'jam' and sweets. The leaves, flowers and seeds were used as a treatment for cancer in Mexico.

Cultivation practices

Planting

After ploughing, a disc harrow will give a relatively smooth and well-prepared surface. The planting

holes should be about 300 x 300 mm wide and 500 mm deep. The roots of the young trees should not be exposed to fertilisers, that is, fertiliser should not be applied in the planting hole. The right time to plant is when the trees are in the deepest dormancy (usually from 15 June to 15 July) to avoid shock. Later planting results in unsatisfactory growth later in the season. The recommended planting distance is 5 to 6 m between rows and 4 m between trees, depending on the soil type and implements to be used.

Fertilisation

The best way to monitor nutrient levels in both foliage and soil is to do leaf analysis and soil testing. Leaf analysis enables a grower to determine if the tree has obtained the necessary nutrients from the soil. If the elements are low, this can be corrected by appropriate measures. If no soil samples are analysed, fertilisation of fruit trees should be dictated by the soil pH.



Irrigation

Certain important factors should be taken into consideration in deciding on the volume and frequency of irrigation of apricot trees. Such factors include soil type, water quality, climate, season, type of fruit, the age and size of trees, growth phase of the trees, the type of irrigation system used as well as mulching with organic material such as straw. Sandy soils have low water-holding capacities. It is therefore essential to apply small volumes of water at relatively short intervals. Clayey soils have higher water-holding capacities. Larger volumes of water should therefore be applied with longer intervals between irrigations. The climate also determines the frequency and intensity of irrigation.

Weed control

Grass and weeds absorb considerable quantities of nitrogen and water to the detriment of trees. The drip areas of the trees must always be kept clean because most of the feeding roots of the trees are in these areas. Regular slashing between the rows will in due course eradicate all aggressive annual weed and grass species, and the more acceptable perennial grasses will form a cover between rows. Keeping this cover short (mowing) assist in preserving moisture in the soil and in preventing erosion.

Pest and disease control

The Mediterranean fruitfly (*Ceratitis capitata*) and Natal fruitfly (*Pterandrus rosa*) can attack the fruit. The symptoms are numerous cream-coloured maggots inside the fruit. The false codling moth (*Cryptophlebia leucotreta*) is a larger reddish-white worm (usually