

**COASTAL GARDENER**  
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**Q:** I have an apricot tree. This year it had a very small crop, but – even worse – the few fruits present were very small. Can you help?

**A:** The small crop (few fruit) is the easier question to answer. During the spring of 2006, the Central Coast had much rainy weather. Unfortunately, much of this rain and cool temperatures came during the bloom period for apricots and other fruit trees. “Bad” weather caused a severe reduction in bee activity during this critical bloom period. Without bees and other insect activity, there was no pollination, hence no fruit set, hence no or few apricots.

The size of the fruit is a more difficult problem. I suspect it is related to the nutrition of the tree. Fruit trees should be fertilized at least twice a year – spring and fall. A mature apricot tree should receive one to two pounds of actual nitrogen per year plus equivalent amounts of phosphorus and potassium. For example, if you use an all purpose garden fertilizer, say a 16-16-16, that means that 16% of what is in the bag is nitrogen. Therefore, the tree should receive approximately six pounds of this formulation of fertilizer per year. Apply three pounds in the spring (late Feb-Mar) and the second three pounds in the fall (late Sept-Oct). The fertilizer should be applied evenly over the root system of the tree out to the dripline. Even slightly beyond the dripline is OK as tree roots often extend well beyond the dripline. If the tree is on bare ground, cultivate the fertilizer into the soil an inch or two and apply water as you would for a normal irrigation. If your tree is growing in a lawn, the grass will rob most of a broadcast application of fertilizer. Therefore, I suggest “feeding stations” for fertilizer application. Set up a grid around the tree. Make a circle three feet from the trunk. At three foot spacings on this circle bore a one-inch diameter hole approximately six to eight inches deep. Apply one-quarter to one-half cup of fertilizer to each hole. Make a second circle six feet from the trunk and repeat the boring and application process. Make a third circle, etc., until you reach the dripline of the tree.

At times, fruit trees and other landscape plants develop other nutrient deficiencies. Iron chlorosis is especially common on the Central Coast. If this type of deficiency occurs, it is often best to treat the plant with “foliar feed” compounds. Special “spray on” products must be purchased for foliar application. Usually a number of foliar applications will be needed to correct a nutrient deficiency using foliar sprays. Also these products can be expensive. Therefore, get the deficiency specifically identified, then purchase and apply the correct nutrient compound(s) according to label direction for best results.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**