

Dog Days To-Do List

By Rick Dantzler, CRDF chief operating officer



The “dog days of summer” are from July 3 to August 11, a time of particularly hot and humid weather. This period coincides with the early morning rising of Sirius, known as the “Dog Star,” the brightest star in the night sky. Sirius’ early rising was believed by many in ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome to contribute to the extreme weather of the season.

This period is also a slower time of the year. But for citrus growers, there is still a lot to do. Water removal systems — from pump maintenance to canal cleaning — in the flatwoods and Indian River areas need to be ready to handle excess water from heavy summer rains or hurricanes.

Soil and leaf samples have just been collected or are in the process of being collected to aid in planning next year’s nutritional programs. Mapping out the nutritional program is likely underway for the fall fertilizer program that would begin in mid or late September, depending on weather conditions.

Growers with fresh fruit will be watching for citrus canker.

Irrigation systems and pumps will be serviced to make sure they are operational before heading into the fall period when soil conditions can become dry.

Processors will surely be estimating this year’s crop to help determine fruit contracts.

And this year, growers will be monitoring tree health and crop development after injecting oxytetracycline this past spring. The good news is that most growers are seeing a positive response in trees from this treatment. The proof will be in the pudding this season when the harvest comes in. However, the full benefit of this therapy will likely take several seasons to realize.

Growers are possibly considering the use of 2,4-D products to reduce pre-harvest fruit drop because there is data showing a positive effect. The Citrus Research and Development Foundation’s (CRDF) Brandon Page recently compiled data from an enlightening CRDF-funded trial. It can be found on the CRDF website (citrusrdf.org).

This same report includes data on gibberellic acid testing. It, too, showed improvements compared to the standards, although not as universal or as significant as 2,4-D. Please realize these results are from just one trial. Tripti Vashisth, University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) associate professor, is the expert and has much more data on these therapies.

Fernando Alferéz, UF/IFAS assistant professor, has studies showing brassinosteroid use increased Brix levels by more than a point approximately 30 days after application. If calibrated with harvesting schedules, this could be huge.

CRDF has additional projects underway to test other antimicrobials and products that hold just as much promise. Watch this space for the latest news.

Of course, these therapies — those current and those to come — cost money, and growers can’t do it all. So, the dog days are a good time to plan caretaking budgets. And when you need a break, think of cooler weather and football season, both of which are right around the corner.



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