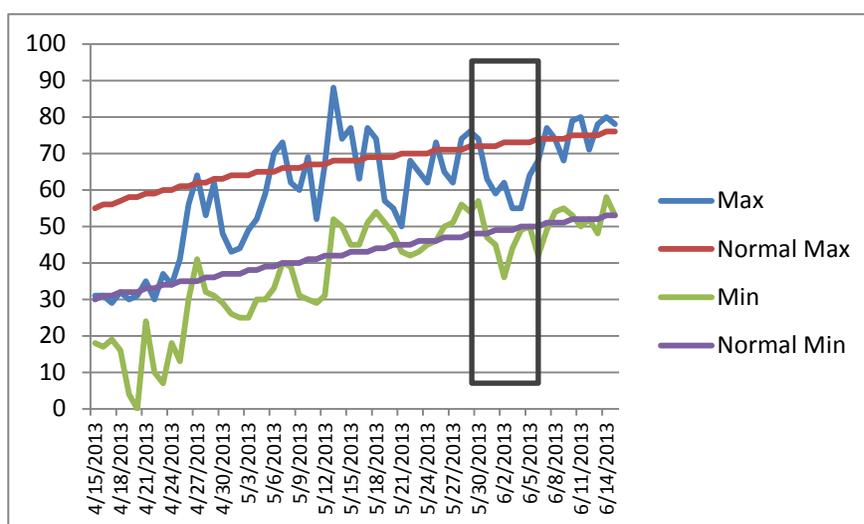


Black Currant Update – 2013

Currants generally recovered from the 2012 spring freeze and production was the best we have ever had. There was quite a bit of pruning selection to do this spring as there were so many new shoots that grew last year. ‘Hilltop Baldwin’ had branches that finished dying over this past winter and some plants were reduced to all new canes; it was most affected by the 2012 freeze. Most other varieties had a good mix of branch year-classes.

Two varieties that seem to be of note in our trial are ‘Titania’ and ‘Minaj Smyriou’. Both have had excellent production the last two years when compared to the other demonstration and trial members.

- ‘Titania’ has been used as the primary commercial variety on the East Coast but is falling out of favor as it has started to show susceptibility to white pine blister rust. We have not seen any infection here though it grows among other plants that are heavily infected each fall. It has one of the most pleasant tastes of our 10 cultivars: It is sweet-tart and is rich but not bitter. Perhaps its only drawback is that the berries start to become reddish colored and off-flavored near the ground where they first ripen. This year, I shook the lower branches over large, flat pizza boxes on a Friday and we harvested the rest of the berries the next week. Production was an amazing 9.5 pounds per plant. I say amazing, because we do not irrigate our orchard.
- ‘Minaj Smyriou’ was quite tasty this year; perhaps I got it at just the ideal point of ripeness. Normally I feel that its pulp is thick and almost gloppy as compared to other varieties (This would be no problem for jam or steam juicing). Production was 7.5 pounds per plant this year and even 4.5 pounds per plant last year, with very little freeze damage. It seems to shrug off the inclement weather.



In the figure to the *left*, the black box represents the period of maximum bloom for black currants in 2013. It was a cool period, though not so cool as to prevent pollination by honeybees.

While I have used both soil and foliar liquid fertilizer applications in the orchard plants each year, I have never applied very much nitrogen because growth and plant health looked pretty good. During the winter, I looked up currant fertility recommendations and decided to fertilize everything once in early summer, after bloom. The recommendations say to do a split application, once in the early spring and once after bloom but truthfully, currants bud out so early that I am still pruning other plants during the early window. Grape research shows that grapes don't really use soil-applied nutrients until the soil warms up - and perhaps that applies to all plants.

I already had 8-30-2 liquid fertilizer and so I bought 28-0-0 and combined these with some Agro-K brand fertilizers in my application. The recommendations I found for currants are 0.4-0.46 oz nitrogen per plant. Because we have 3.5-4% organic matter soils, I calculated the nitrogen application a bit lower, at 0.315 oz/plant.

The past several years I have used a foliar feeding program every two weeks but I was just too busy this year to manage it. With the higher-nitrogen soil application, our plants looked really good this year. They just seemed a bit more robust and yet they did not overgrow. Fall hardiness seemed typical, so I will make this application again in 2014.