

## Plum Update – 2006-2012

In 2009, harvest began on September 15<sup>th</sup> and in 2010, picking began on August 15<sup>th</sup>. 'Toka' ripens the latest and has the best tasting fruit; however, they are very small – only 3/4<sup>th</sup> to 1-inch in diameter.

Plum curculios, a type of weevil, ruined a large portion of the crop in 2009. They are one of the most common and damaging pests of stone fruits. The insects leave a crescent- or D-shaped scar on the surface of the fruit while their larvae tunnels through the developing fruit. Affected fruit turns color early which allows them to be identified, picked and destroyed before the insects mature. They are difficult to control organically, though chickens are said to help!

In 2010, no plum curculio damage was found and fruit production was good. In early August, it was very dry and squirrels started eating the green plums. After it rained, they stopped until the fruit ripened. 'Waneta' fruit suffered from bruised-looking spots that reminded us of 'blossom end rot' which is caused by calcium deficiency and often seen in tomatoes. Samples of the fruit were sent to both NDSU Plant Diagnostic Lab and UW-Wisconsin Plant Disease Diagnostics Clinic. Results were negative for disease, but if the problem is seen again, both affected and unaffected fruit will be analyzed for an array of micronutrients.



There were plenty of flowers in the spring, but there were almost no plums in 2011, except for 'Waneta' fruits (harvested September 7). They did not show the syndrome that appeared last year and they were tasty. This year was the last of the three snowy winters in a row. This spring, beautiful birds feasted on insects in the plum trees. The following pictures are from one afternoon. I wish the quality was better.



Scarlet Tanager



Orchard Oriole



Tennessee Warbler



Yellow Warbler

The blossom period was very early in 2012. On April 24<sup>th</sup>, I considered the blossoms of 'Pembina' and 'Toka' to be 95% completed. The blossoming of 'Pipestone' was 25% and 'Waneta' was 15% completed. Our bee hives arrived on Sunday, April 29<sup>th</sup> and they were visiting the remaining flowers by Monday. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, 'Pembina' and 'Toka' flowering was considered completed while 'Pipestone' and 'Waneta' still had active flowers at 50% and 10-30%, respectively.

In the summer, 'Pipestone' and 'Waneta' had very little fruit while one 'Toka' tree and two 'Pembina' trees had very big crops. The varieties that were considered to have completed flowering before the honeybees arrived were the only ones to have significant crops.

At the University of Saskatchewan-Saskatoon website, there is an article about pollination of hybrid plums. <http://fruit.usask.ca/articles/plums.pdf> It indicates that these plums do not pollinate each other very well, not even 'Toka', which is advertised as a pollinizer. Wild plum trees are recommended as the ideal pollinizer. CREC added a plum tree selected out of a shelterbelt by the USDA Plant Materials Center. They were advised to call it a hybrid plum, but we are hoping it has more compatible pollen for these trees. It was planted in spring 2010.