Keep the blooms, but lose the crab apples

The white and pink flowers of crab apples are a welcome contrast to gray winter days, but the bloom boom means that fruit will follow. Nowadays, with fewer people making crab apple jelly, some consider prolific crab apple fruit to be a sidewalk nuisance.

In the long run, the easiest way to enjoy the flowers but avoid the fruit is to plant one of the flowering crab cultivars that produce no fruit. On existing trees, you can prevent fruit from forming, but you have to be on the ball to apply the right amount of plant hormone at the right time.

One synthetic plant hormone, called Naphthalene acetic Acid (NAA, for short), causes young fruit to abort while doing no harm to the tree or to surrounding plants or insects. Follow the concentration recommendations on the label.

Ethephon is a plant-growth regulator found in products such as Florel. It readily decomposes to produce the natural plant hormone ethylene, which interferes with the fruit’s growth.

Whatever product you use, follow the label directions and spray those trees within 10 days after they begin to bloom. If you apply the wrong concentration, or do it at the wrong time, nothing will happen. He who waits is lost!

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