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Managing a nut orchard

When the trees are planted and the irrigation system is up and running the real challenge begins.

Management of young trees

The main aim with young trees is to achieve maximum tree growth and reduce the time to the first harvest. To do this the trees need optimum growing conditions and lots of tender loving care. To think that newly planted trees can be left to their own devices apart from occasional weekend irrigation is nonsense. Success in nut production lies with good orchard management in the early years. It must be remembered that the root system of a young tree is limited and to support the growing canopy soil moisture and fertility must be adequate at all times. A young tree is sensitive to fluctuations in environmental conditions, to competition from weeds, and stress from wind and pests. If growth ceases during the growing season it may not re-start until the following season.

To maintain adequate soil moisture the frequency of irrigation in a young orchard may be as often as every day or two during very hot weather, but water demand varies according to the age of the tree, the type of nut tree, rainfall, soil type, temperature and wind strength. In trial orchards, it has been shown that frequent applications of low doses of fertiliser throughout the growing season promote excellent growth of young trees. Frequency of application may be more often than once per week. It has been shown that frequent applications of nitrogen and potassium during the growing season will produce excellent growth in young trees.

Of course promoting ideal growing conditions for young trees also creates ideal growing conditions for weeds. Weed control, however, is difficult around young trees because the trunk is green and the tree is susceptible to herbicide damage. Non-systemic or 'knock-down' herbicides are safest to use around young trees because the risk of