

Title Cultivar differences in preharvest firmness development in sweet cherries (*Prunus avium* L.)
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Abstract

Fruit flesh firmness is regarded as an important quality factor in sweet cherries; soft-fleshed fruit is usually more prone to quality loss during post harvest handling than are firm cherries. Preharvest firmness development was measured over two years in seven different sweet cherry varieties grouped into soft, medium firm and very firm cultivars. Corresponding changes in fruit surface colour and soluble solid contents of the fruit juice were measured. The three groups were very different in preharvest reduction of fruit firmness. Soft-fleshed fruit had a sharp decline in fruit flesh firmness prior to and throughout the normal harvesting period, fruit of medium firmness had a less sharp decline, while firm fruits lost little or none of the initial fruit flesh firmness, or even increased it to some extent over this period. Differences between years are discussed in relation to differences in climatic conditions.