

Season summary | 11 November 2026

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Set up for great season of summerfruit

Short summary

We don't know what summer will bring but so far, spring has been kind to summerfruit growers in Hawke's Bay and Central Otago, with growing conditions and fruit set setting growers up for excellent fruit size and quality this summer.

In this article, Sean Gresham discusses the climatic conditions this spring.

Main article

As summer approaches we can tentatively reflect on what summer is likely to bring. I am not a forecaster so have no clue on how much or how little rain or sunshine is to come but as an agronomist, I am reasonably confident we should have some excellent summerfruit available in the coming months.

Spring conditions were relatively kind throughout the country, which backed up a relatively 'normal' winter. Conditions over spring can influence fruit set and early fruit growth, which ultimately determines the potential size, quality, and volume of fruit at harvest. The 'potential' is a critical qualifier, especially with summerfruit, as ripening fruit becomes increasingly susceptible to losses from short-sharp weather events such as windstorms, hail, or heavy rain.

In addition, pests and diseases can rob good fruit if they are not well controlled. That said, there is a nice-looking crop across the major growing regions, thanks to a relatively kind spring.

In **Hawke's Bay**, growing degree days are back on last year but more aligned with the long-term average and slightly ahead of the 2015-16 season (previous strong El Nino). Fruit maturity looks only slightly behind last year, and some varieties and sub-regions are reporting potential for slightly a earlier harvest. The milder conditions in early spring have provided a moderate crop of apricots and plums, and peaches and nectarines are looking in good shape. Fruit set for most cherry varieties was moderate to light, which is great for fruit size and sweetness. We're expecting a dry summer and rainfall hasn't quite kept pace with demand through evapotranspiration (ET) so irrigation will be an important ingredient to keep fruit growing. Hawke's bay received 37mm, 44mm and 37mm of rain respectively in August, September and October this year, with ET increasing from 50mm in August to 100mm in October.

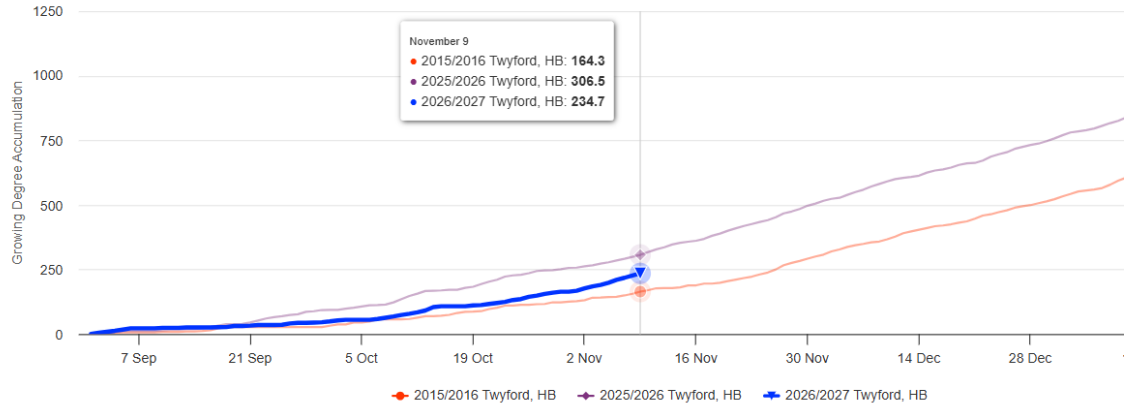


Figure 1. Twyford (Hawke's Bay) Weather Station Growing Degree Days - comparison of last season and previous strong El Nino (2015-16).

For **Central Otago**, the season is early thanks to an abnormally warm spring for that far south. Despite some spring snow events that coated the tops, the weather has been relatively kind (lower number of frosts, high winds, etc). Conditions over flowering for cherries were excellent for bee activity, but that hasn't translated through to a heavy fruit set. Crop loads are variable across varieties and sub-regions, but overall, things are looking promising for good size. Peaches and nectarines have a good crop and are slightly ahead of last year. Apricots had excellent fruit set and are sizing well. They are expected to be harvested a week or so ahead of last year. Central Otago is famously dry but soil moisture deficits are only just starting to develop. Rainfall nearly matched demand in August and September (65mm and 51mm rain, vs 43mm and 80mm ET); and October had a moderate deficit with 54mm rainfall vs 109mm ET. The expected dryer summer will mean that good irrigation management should allow for excellent fruit quality.

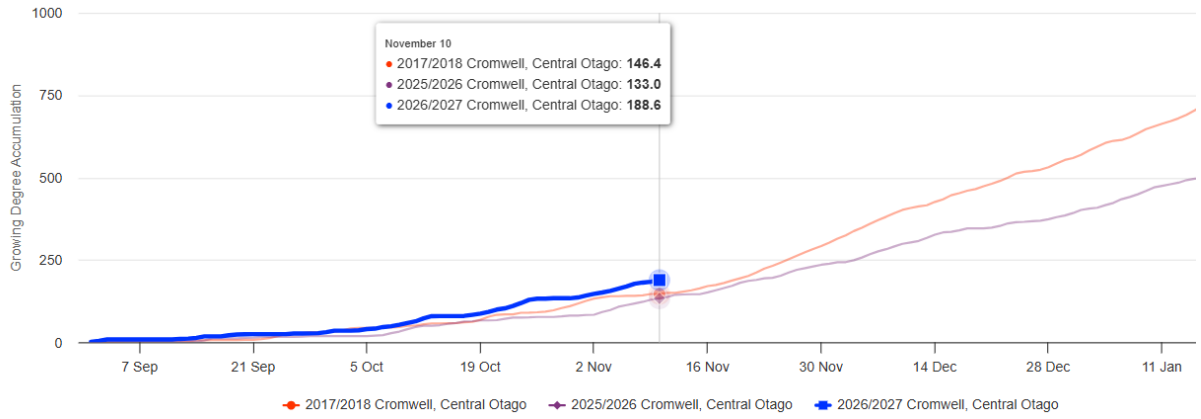


Figure 2. Cromwell Weather Station Growing Degree Days - comparison of last season and previous warm season (2017-2018)

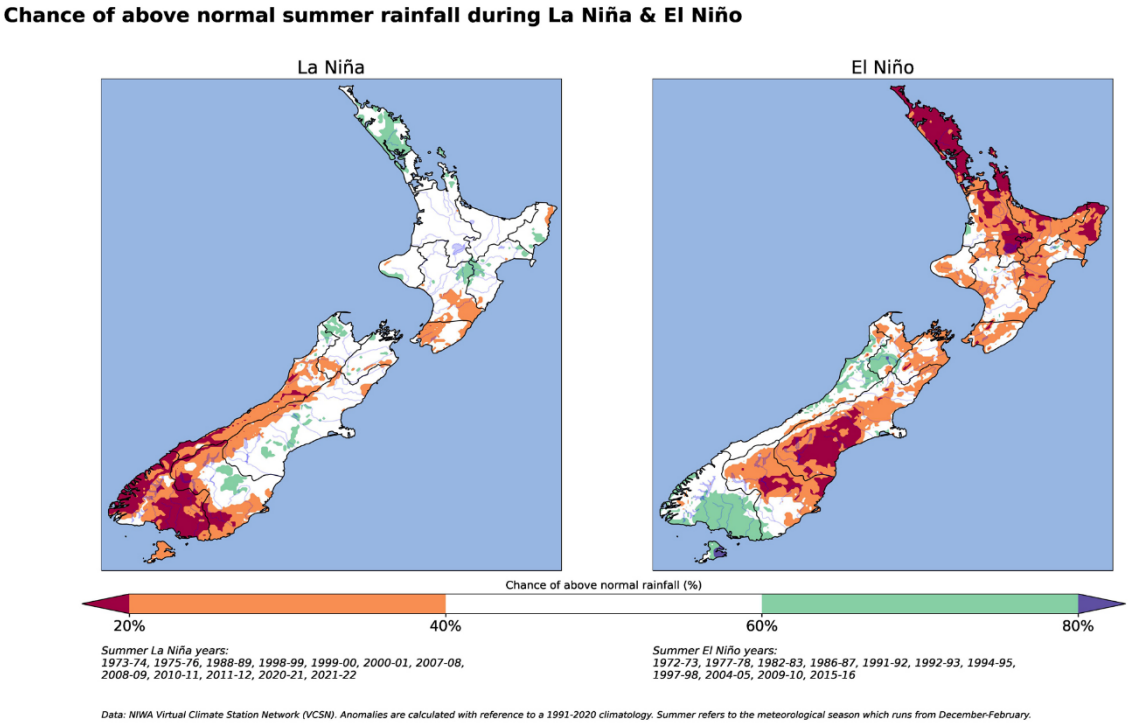


Figure 3. NIWA rainfall anomaly predictions

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