

WHY PRUNE?

Pruning is necessary to preserve a fruit tree's health, contributing to enhanced vigor, vitality, and yield for harvesting. It is beneficial for establishing strong limbs, proper air circulation, and reduction in the possibility of pests and disease. It is much better to prune a fruit tree than to leave it alone and never prune them at all.

TOOLS TO USE

HAND PRUNERS—for young trees and branches less than an inch thick, mostly for the first year of growth

LOPPERS—for branches up to 2 inches in diameter, mostly for the second year of growth

PRUNING SAW

for thicker branches—
pole saws used for higher branches.
Mostly for the third year of growth and beyond.

Always check that your tools are clean and adequately sharpened to prevent the spread of disease. Use either isopropyl alcohol wipes or a mild bleach solution to thoroughly clean your pruning tools following each cut.

WHEN TO PRUNE

Prune young fruit trees immediately following planting. After planting, prune while the trees are dormant in late winter-early spring, and when it is easy to view any potentially damaged limbs.

Remove any damaged or dead limbs at any time during the year. To avoid spreading disease, choose to prune on a dry, rainless day.



HOW TO PRUNE

Fruit pruning cuts come in two types:

HEADING CUT



Heading cuts shorten the branch to redirect growth. These should be made at a 45 degree angle just above a healthy bud, avoiding disease by directing water away from the bud.

THINNING CUT



Thinning cuts remove the entire bough to remove dead or diseased wood, or open up the canopy to sunlight. These type of cuts are made above the limb collar.

FRUIT TREE PRUNING FORMS

Four common forms include:

CENTRAL LEADER: recommended for fruit trees whose branches naturally have more of an upright growth habit, rather than a spreading nature. With this form, a single trunk with scaffold limbs allows for adequate light exposure throughout the tree's canopy.

MODIFIED LEADER: Has a lower growing shape and a more rounded top than the central leader style. Each outer leader becomes progressively shorter as they move outward from the center of the tree.

ESPALIER: the practice of decoratively training plants to a flat plane such as a wall, fence or trellis

OPEN CENTER: the most common form of pruning for home gardeners. Establishes a vase-like form to maintain the tree at manageable heights for harvesting, improved limb strength, and maximum fruit production



GUIDE TO PRUNING FRUIT TREES



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YOUR SPRINGTIME PRUNING PLAN



PLANTING TIME

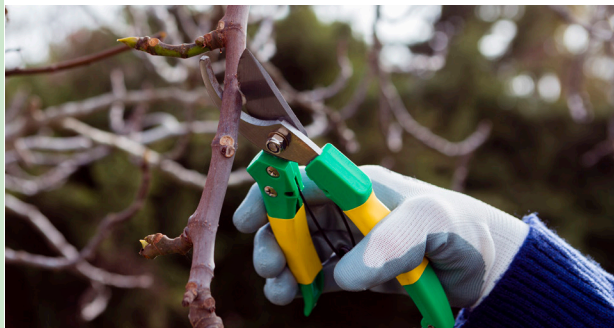
TREES WITHOUT BRANCHES: After planting, trim the tree's central leader to about 25-30 inches above the ground. As a result, branching will start to develop about 6 inches below the cut.

TREES WITH BRANCHES: Remove all branches that are up to 15 inches above the ground. Select 3-4 strong branches that are 16-30 inches above the ground that are growing at a 60-90 degree angle at different areas from the main trunk, and cut these selected branches back by one-half to an outward-facing bud. Remove the central leader just above the tallest selected branch.

The fruit tree will start displaying an open shape by the end of the summer.

1 EARLY SPRING

Remove all dead or diseased branches, thinning out all vigorous upright shoots growing within the main scaffold. Prune to maintain the open or vase shape.



2 2nd EARLY SPRING

The tree will now begin to create its sub-scaffolding, now that the main scaffold has been established.

Select 2-3 side branches on each main scaffold limb. Each branch should be spaced 6-8 inches apart, on opposing sides of the scaffold limb, and 18-24 inches from the tree trunk.

Remove all other side branches, including those growing inside the open center. Prune the selected side branches and primary scaffold back by one-half.

3 3rd EARLY SPRING

Remove any dead, damaged, or diseased limbs. Continue maintaining the open center, with 3-5 scaffold limbs evenly distributed at wide angles around the trunk.

Prune back the scaffold and sub-scaffold limbs to maintain the tree size and encourage new wood growth.

Thin out any suckers (quick, upright-growing shoots at the base of the trunk) and water sprouts (thin shoots on the trunk and limbs), neither of which are fruit-bearing.

4 MATURE FRUIT TREES

Every spring, continue to prune back the height and width of mature fruit trees, maintaining the vase shape. Remove any dead, damaged, or diseased wood. Prune back the primary scaffold limbs to an outside-growing side branch.

Keep horizontally-growing shoots while removing all others. Thin out fruiting shoots to about 6 inches apart on a branch.

