

Basic Fruit Tree Pruning



Virtually nothing is more important than proper pruning for fruit production. If left unpruned, fruit trees may struggle in growth, and, if you encounter an unfortunate drought, they may not grow at all. More importantly, unpruned trees take longer to bear fruit!

Preferred Time

- The best time to prune fruit trees is when they are dormant (the leaves are off). Late winter into very early spring is the preferred time to prune. Do not prune in early fall since it stimulates new growth when the tree should be getting ready for winter and they may not harden off.
- Prune every year to prevent 'alternate bearing' where fruit is abundant one year and puny the next.
- The first two years allow the tree to establish itself and only prune to remove dead, damaged or diseased branches. The third year is when you will start the heavier pruning and continue annually.

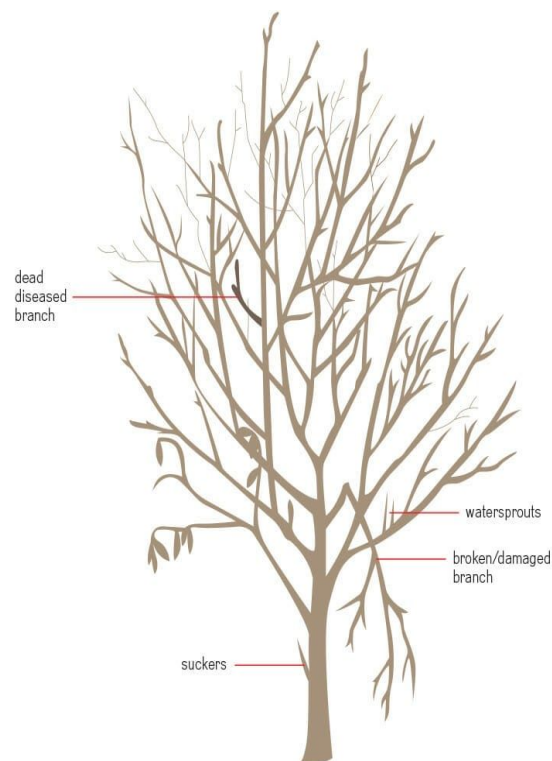
Tools

- Hand Pruners: for small branches and twigs
- Loppers: more leverage for larger branches
- Folding Saw: for limbs larger than 3"

**Always use sharp, clean tools*

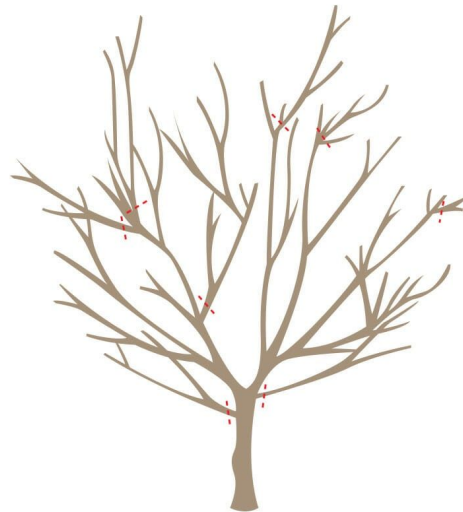
Step One:

- Clean up any dead, damaged or diseased branches...a.k.a. the three D's.
- Are sprouts coming from the base of the trunk? If so, remove them – technically they're called 'suckers' and they originate from the rootstock rather than the fruiting variety grafted on top.
- How about suspiciously straight sprouts growing from some of the main branches? These erect, perfectly vertical branches, or "watersprouts," – should be removed as well.
- With all these clean-up cuts, it's important to prune the branches back flush to the larger limb they're growing from – don't leave little stubs.



Step Two:

- The goal of thinning is to allow light and air into the canopy, which boosts fruit production and reduces problems with pests and disease.
- First, remove any branches that grow downward, toward the center of the tree or that cross paths with another branch.
- Once these are out of the way, stand back and take a look. The goal is to have evenly spaced branches splaying out in a pleasing, fractal-like pattern from the center.
- Do you see places where multiple branches compete with each other? You might find two or more growing from a single crotch at a narrow angle, for example, or from different points but in a parallel fashion, one hovering over the other.
- If so, thin out all but one branch, retaining the branch with the healthiest appearance and best crotch angle (roughly the 2 o'clock or 10 o'clock angle from the center of the tree). Wider angles can break when laden with fruit and narrower angles lead to bushy growth and fruit that is too high to pick.
- Next, continue to thin the tree until there is a good 6 to 12 inches of air space around every branch. The smaller the branches are, the closer they can be to each other.
- As with your clean-up cuts, all thinning cuts should be made flush to the branch.



TIPS FROM THE PROS

10 O'CLOCK PRUNING ANGLE Narrow, V-shape crotches are an open invitations to disastrous splitting later on, particularly when your tree is ripening a bumper crop. So choose wide 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock angles.



PRUNING TO A BUD Make sharp, clean cuts close enough so that you won't leave a clumsy stub that's hard to heal over. Stay far enough above the bud so it won't die back. Slant the cuts as shown, and the new growth will develop beautifully.



Just Right



Too Far



Too Close

ALWAYS PRUNE BACK TO BUDS AIMED IN THE DIRECTION YOU WANT LIMBS TO GROW Every branch has buds pointed in various directions. Since you want vigorous new growth to spread away from the center of the tree, make your cut above a bud that's aimed outward. This helps your tree grow into a spreading shape.

