

REASONS TO PRUNE FRUIT TREES

By Tom Del Hotal

HEALTH

Prune off the four D's: Dead, Damaged, Diseased and Dysfunctional branches.

STRUCTURAL STRENGTH

Train scaffold branches to be spaced along the trunk both vertically and radially when trees are young.

Prune off branches which are attached to the bottom side of attached branches. (Unless this is going to become the new terminal end of the branch.)

Increase the crotch angle of branches to greater than 30 degrees by spreading branches apart or by pruning off one of the branches.

Remove co-dominant leaders by removing or reducing one of the branches.

FRUIT PRODUCTION

Prune trees to specific shapes for best fruit production. (Open vase or modified open vase for trees in the genus Prunus, central leader or modified central leader for all others.)

Prune to leave fruiting wood for specific fruit types. (Fruiting spurs, last season's growth/ one year old wood, or current season's growth.)

Thin branches and fruiting wood to allow adequate light penetration and air circulation for proper fruit development for each fruit tree type.

TREE SIZE

Fruit trees which are pruned to their maximum size will produce the greatest amount of fruit. These trees are pruned into central leader or modified open vase shapes.

To keep fruit trees smaller for ease of picking the fruit, to get more trees into an area, or because of space limitations, prune to modified central leader or open vase shapes.

Never top or head branches or trees!!! (The only exception is when you are pollarding a tree.) Topping or heading has many harmful effects on tree growth and tree health. The results include excessive, poorly attached branch growth, disease and decay, and starvation among others and never results in reducing the size of the tree long term! Reduce the height or width of a tree or the length of a branch by the pruning technique known as drop-crotching.

Manage the growth in the tree so that one branch or side of the tree does not overgrow the other portions of the tree and so that the tree keeps a balanced shape.

DIRECT OR REDIRECT GROWTH

Prune to a terminal branch to direct growth in that direction.

As branches bend downward from the weight of fruit, foliage, or wood, they often need to be pruned back into an upright growing position. Use drop-crotching pruning techniques to a side or top branch to redirect growth.

FUNCTION

Fruit trees can be pruned to fulfill landscape needs with proper pruning techniques. These can include shade trees, screens, hedges, large shrubs, espaliers and others.

To increase fruit variety or extend fruiting season where space is limited or when smaller amounts of each type of fruit is desired, more than one tree can be planted together in a single planting hole. This results in what appears to be a multi-trunked tree. Trees of similar types, growth habits, and cultural requirements must be selected to be grown together. (Citrus with citrus, avocado with avocado, apples with apples, peaches and nectarines together, plums and apricots together, etc.) When planting multiple trees together, each tree becomes a portion of the overall tree shape! The principles of pruning are applied and trees are pruned so that the entire group of trees is pruned to the proper shape (open vase, central leader, etc.) for that fruit type.

TRAINING

Training branches by tying them into position or by other methods (spreading, etc.) can be a very valuable strategy for shaping fruit trees. Training can often use a branch that would normally be pruned away as a valuable part of the trees shape. Direct existing branches by training them in order to take advantage of the past years growth and save time in developing new branches in needed areas of the tree.

To prevent injury to the bark of branches which are being trained, any material which is in contact with the branch should be at least 1 inch wide. The material can be a variety of items including strips of nylon webbing, rubber inner tube, tire, cloth or any other material. The material should be loose enough so as not to potentially girdle the branch as the branch grows in diameter.



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