

Fruit Tree Health & Pruning

Keeping fruit trees healthy is essential to quality fruit production.



Sanitation is Vital to Tree Health

Use a 10% bleach solution to dip or spray tools whenever you prune unhealthy areas and each time you start pruning a different tree. Clorox wipes or other wipes with bleach also work well.

Set tools on something other than ground to prevent picking up soil-borne fungus or pathogens.



Top Four Reasons for Health Assessment:

1. Safety hazards, resulting in potential liability: defects, rubbing or crossing branches, irregular growth, targets below, fire/fuel ladder (live or dead vegetation that allows fire to climb a tree)
2. Plant health: physiological damage, root zone disturbance, pathogens, diseases, insect or animal damage
3. Mechanized damage: vehicles, mower blight, trimmer blight
4. Maintaining appropriate size

Reading the Signs:

- Fungus or mushrooms on bark or at base: indication of decay
- Graft failure: can occur 40 years into tree's life
- Sawdust: waste of boring insects, indication of damage within the tree
- Splits in bark of abnormal depth: splintered wood indicates strain or lightning strike
- Hollow spots: could be result of poor pruning
- Foliage dieback, particularly regional: indicates disease, girdling, excessive soil compaction
- Prolific fruiting: may indicate root or trunk damage, especially in plums—excessive fruit is the tree trying to propagate before death.

Fruit Tree Pruning Tips

Fruit trees require some yearly pruning maintenance to ensure a plentiful yield for the coming year's harvest. Stone fruits like nectarines, plums and peaches benefit from thinning for larger, tastier fruit.

Apples

Apples appear on short, stubby spurs that can produce for 20 years. Spurs form near base of new wood. Removing spurs can stunt production or even kill the tree.

Prune hard to remove weak, dead or poorly spaced branches prior to fruit drop to avoid removing spurs. Keep the tree's center open and remove suckers. Up to 2/3 of the new growth can be removed each year.



Apricots

Fruit grows on 1 year old shoots and sometimes on 2 to 3 year old wood. Apricot wood is quite brittle; pruning back to fat wood prevents breakage due to fruit weight.

Pruning right after the tree has fruited is ideal, typically late summer or early fall before the fall rainy season. Modified Central Leader is the best fruiting style for apricots.

Citrus

Citrus needs pruning only for height management and light thinning for air circulation. Be careful of buds and blossoms for future fruit.

Figs

Typically with 2 crops per year, figs produce on the previous year's wood in June with a larger crop late summer to early autumn.

Pruning old, unproductive branches and thinning to shape and increase air circulation in the tree's center are all a fig needs. Avoid cutting out new productive wood. Prune during dormancy, but expect a minimized June crop the following season.

Nectarines, Peaches and Almonds

These stone fruits can handle heavy pruning. For dwarf trees, cut central leader when dormant (if smaller than 1/2" diameter) to determine future branch height.

Fruit typically buds in the center third of branches. Thin the top of mature trees to provide more light to the growing fruit. With heavy yield, prune the outer third and previous year's growth or remove 2 of every 3 branches to prevent heavily weighted branches and breakage.

Pruning in Spring promotes abundant fruit production and overall tree health. Thin out some fruit if the crop is particularly abundant to allow space for individual fruits to grow larger. Be sure to prop branches that are heavily laden with fruit to avoid splits in the crotch of the branch or loss of the entire limb.



Pears

Pears grow on spurs of wood 2 years or older at the base of new wood. Prune lightly to shape and prevent crowding. Prune in late summer after seasonal growth ends and wood hardens.

Persimmons

Prune brittle Persimmon wood in dormancy; develop strong angles. For old trees, deep crotch prune. Thin, remove dead wood and shape.

Plums

Bearing fruit on wood 2 years or older on fruiting spurs that produce for 10 years, plums need severe pruning to control vertical shoots.



Prune 1/2 to 2/3 of the new growth each year. Keep the center open and thinned to expose growing fruit to the sunlight. Plums benefit from summer pruning to reduce risk of Silver Leaf disease.

Dormant Spray Treatments

Properly Diagnose Ailments Before Applying Dormant Sprays

General application rule: apply product 3 times during the dormant season once the tree is leafless, 30 or so days apart, especially on peaches and nectarines; repeat after significant rains.

December 1 • New Year's Day • Valentine's Day

(All dates depending on the weather)

Spray:

- Copper Fungicide 24 hours before oil treatment
- Early on a day without wind
- 24 hours or more before expected rain
- Before bud break—never after! Treatment closest to bud break is most effective

Fruit trees need two types of winter protection: **Insect and Fungus**



Monterey Horticultural Oil is the organic option to control all insect pests. Superior type paraffinic oil for use as a growing season spray, dormant spray (no leaves) or delayed dormant (green tip) spray.

Bonide Liquid Copper Fungicide: Copper Sulfate 7% organically treats Brown Rot, Black Spot, Blotch, Downy and Powdery Mildew, Fire Blight, Leaf Spot, Peach Leaf Curl, Rust, Scab.

Bonide Sulfur Plant Fungicide: Sulfur 90% organically controls a large number of diseases on fruit trees. The specially prepared micronized sulfur results in fine particle size for better coverage and adhesion used as a dust or spray.



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