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Pruning Fruit Trees

Most people know that fruit trees should be pruned, but many don't do it because they are uncertain when to do it, how to do it, and what tools to use. Here are a few basic guidelines.

The best time to prune fruit trees and shrubs is in early spring while the tree is still dormant, before growth activity begins.

Young trees are pruned to give them a desired form and to develop a strong framework that will support fruit in later years. Young fruit trees are trained in two ways, either by the central leader (apples and pears) or the open center method (peaches, apricots, and Japanese plums).

Trees already producing fruit are pruned to remove dead, diseased and broken branches, to remove undesirable growth, to promote growth of young fruiting wood, and to improve the size and quality of the fruit, to mention just a few.

Even old, abandoned, and overgrown trees can be pruned back into productivity.

The correct tools are a pair of bypass (scissor action) pruning shears, long-handled loppers, and a curved saw with a single cutting edge or a bow saw. A pole pruner is helpful for high branches. Make sure your tools are clean and sharp.

How to prune is more involved because it depends on the age of the tree and the type of tree/fruit. If you are unsure how to begin, there is a wealth of information on the internet that includes videos so you can actually see the pruning being done. You can click on one of the links below as a starting point. A few minutes of research and reading will be time well spent.

The Conservation District has pruning tools available to lend to individuals courtesy of Home Depot. A small deposit is required.

Basic Fruit Tree Pruning Instructions - A nice, concise overview.

<http://www.lawn-and-gardening-tips.com/fruit-tree-pruning-instructions.html>

Home Orchard Society

How to Prune Fruit Trees *by Ted Swenson*

<http://www.homeorchardsociety.org/article/14/>

Ten Basics of When and How to Prune Fruit Trees *by Paul Vossen*

<http://cesonoma.ucdavis.edu/files/27164.pdf>

Video on pruning an apple tree

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7224124031635129593#>

Kansas State University publication on pruning fruit trees-- lots of diagrams. Directions for pruning a neglected tree start on page 7.

<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/library/hort2/C631.pdf>

North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service

This article is quite detailed and has plenty of pictures and diagrams to illustrate the instructions.

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/ag29.html#dormant>

Utah State University Cooperative Extension

This article is also detailed, but pictures aren't as good. Starting on page 11 are instructions for pruning an overgrown tree. Following that are instructions for pruning grapes and other small fruits.

http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/HG_363.pdf