

PRUNING **FRUIT TREES**



Getting Started

Fruit trees require pruning to maintain the health and vigour of the tree, as well as to encourage fruit production. Regular pruning opens up the canopy allowing greater air circulation and more light into the canopy. An added bonus is making the fruit easier to pick each year by restricting the size of the tree.

When To Prune

Most deciduous fruit trees and vines are pruned in winter, usually Late June or July. Apricots should be pruned either early in autumn when they still have leaves on.

What To Prune

In addition to encouraging fruit production, fruit trees require regular pruning to remove dead or diseased branches, remove branches that cross over, keep the centre of the plant un – cluttered, and thin out the fruit.

Position Of The Pruning Cut

When making pruning cuts on smaller stems and branches, the position of the cut is just above a node. A node is where a bud, leaf or stem emerges from a branch. The internode is the space along the branch between the nodes. If the cut is made too far into the internode, then the branch usually dies back to the node. This area of die back is a potential entry point for disease.

Pruning Almonds

Almonds do not require much pruning from year to year. In the first year select framework branches and prune lightly.

Pruning Apples & Pears

These are usually pruned to encourage the formation of fruiting spurs, from which the fruit is produced each year. The fruit is produced on at least second year old wood.

The first year of pruning forms the structural framework for the tree.

Step 1 – The leader, is pruned. However, if a raised canopy or an espaliered tree is desired, the leader should not be pruned.

Step 2 – Layers of lateral branches called scaffold branches should be selected approximately 45cm apart. Prune off all other laterals at the trunk.

Step 3 – Prune back the scaffold branches to approximately 20cm in length.

Tree growth should be encouraged in the second and third years, with minimal pruning required. The only pruning should tidy the framework and damaged branches.

Pruning Apricots

These should be pruned in early autumn when they still have leaves on, or in spring after the flower buds have opened. This is to prevent a disease called gummosis entering through the pruning cuts.

In the first year prune to the initial set of sprigs.

Step 1 – The un-pruned tree will have bunches of short twiggy growth (sprigs) roughly half way up the main branches.

The second and third years pruning, shortens the main branches, but do not prune off new sprigs that have been formed until the fourth year when a healthy new sprig is chosen to replace the current one.

Pruning Berries

The first year canes are vigorous and are best left unpruned or tip prune in winter to a suitable length. The following winter prune these canes to the base as they will produce little or no fruit the following season. This encourages new canes to shoot up and produce fruit.

Pruning Cherries

These require little pruning from year to year. The first and second years growth will form framework of the tree. Usually, shortening the main branches by half to two thirds to an outward facing bud is all that is required. Fruiting spurs will develop along the branches, from which the fruit is borne. Thereafter prune out any broken branches, or those that cross over other branches. Old un – productive spurs created by pruning back a new shoot to main lateral.

Pruning Nectarines & Peaches

Vase shaped pruning is the most widely used pruning technique, which aims at developing a strong framework of branches. Fruit is produced on the previous years growth.

First year pruning forms the framework branches for the tree.

Step 1 – The main branches will have many small twiggy branches, called ‘feathers.’ Cut back the main branches back by approximately two thirds to an outward facing ‘feather’.

Step 2 – Prune back the ‘feathers to an outward facing bud.

Step 3 – Prune off all ‘feathers’ growing in towards the centre of the tree.

Second and third year pruning continues the framework of the tree, by selecting and pruning laterals back. Once the framework branches have been selected, then yearly pruning is used to remove dead or diseased branches, remove any branches growing in towards the centre of the tree, and to space and shorten the fruiting branches coming off the main laterals.

Pruning Plums

The first few years of pruning are used to form the framework branches of the tree. Therefore, initially the pruning is the same as for peaches and nectarines. Plums also produce fruiting spurs along their branches. As well as quite vigorous growth from the tops of the branches. This vigorous growth should be checked by pruning out all the top growth on each branch, leaving a single branch as a new leader. This new leader may be shortened to encourage the production of more fruiting spurs along its length. The fruit is borne on wood that is at least two years old, similar to apples and pears.