

Fruit Tree Pruning Basic Concepts to Consider

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- A. Needs to be done every year.
If not, risk tree health and production capacity.
- B. March and April are generally ideal.
Pruning should be done in late winter or early spring before bud expansion begins.
Disease and Injury pruning should be done whenever warranted.
- C. Age, size, and previous pruning dictate what you do.
Most critical pruning years are the tree's first years of growth.
Consistent pruning is necessary during pre-production and production years.
May be even more critical as tree ages and weakens to maximize productivity.

D. Pruning of young trees.

Think of your time spent as training, not pruning.

Proper training yields healthier trees, more overall fruit production, and better-looking trees.

STEP 1 Remove any damaged limbs.

STEP 2 Step back and analyze tree. Keep those branches that are evenly spaced, that have wide branch angles (nearly perpendicular to the main trunk), and that are no less than about 30 inches from ground level.

illustrations are from UWEX bulletin A3565 "Growing Apples in Wisconsin"

E. Annual Pruning in younger years.



Principle #1 Choose strong branches with wide angles to leave on the tree.

Principle #2 Train branches when young if necessary. Can change angle of growth to 60 degrees with wooden spreaders and achieve goal of stronger wood. Consult UWEX publications A1959-Training and Pruning Apple Trees and A3565 for more information on training techniques.

F. Annual Pruning, production years.

For efficient annual pruning, follow these steps:

- Remove broken and diseased branches.
- Cut off water sprouts growing on the trunk and scaffold limbs. Only leave water sprouts if there is a distinct open area that needs filling.
- Remove the weakest of crossing or closely growing parallel limbs.
- Remove all limbs or spurs growing downwards.
- If the tree needs more branch thinning, remove weak, spindly branches first. Remove dense or long growth from the upper portions of the tree which shade lower limbs. Limbs growing within arm's reach are easier to harvest and maintain.

Keep these tips in mind while pruning:

- Use the 10% rule to guide how much pruning to do. Try not to remove more than 10% of the tree's live mass in any one year.
- Light is required for quality fruit.
- Use tools made specifically for pruning. Keep them sharp and clean. Never use a pruning implement that has only one cutting surface.
- Make all cuts smooth and close. Leave the branch collar (slightly enlarged area where the branch meets the main stem) but not a stub.
- On cultivars that bear heavily in alternate years, perform heavier pruning just before the main bearing year.
- Do not cover the pruning cut with anything! Pruning wound paints and coatings cause a much higher risk of certain diseases and significantly slow down the tree's healing process.

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