



Fruit Tree Pruning

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Pruning is important for good tree health, for larger fruit and ease of picking. It is important to keep these things in mind when you prune your fruit trees. Pruning fruit trees is truly an art and a science. You must look at your trees with an artistic eye and imagine the tree in a year, two years and full grown. The initial formative pruning done on a young tree will influence its overall shape, production and ease of picking through its life. You must understand the science of pruning to understand the parts of the tree and what each cut will do as it grows. A simple example of this is to understand the difference between a fruit bud also called a fruit spur that will bear fruit and a leaf bud that will generate a leaf or branch that will not bear fruit.

It is important to know how the branch structure grows and the difference between a lateral branch, the main scaffolding, smaller side branches and water sprouts also called suckers.

Before you start to prune walk around your tree and view it from all angles and get an eye for what you would like your tree to look like and what general shaping ideas you have for the tree. Keep in mind that your trees are living creations and the cuts you make today will govern its shape for the years to come. This is especially true of young trees in their formative stages.

Think openness, sun, large fruit and good ladder sets

General fruit tree pruning instructions:

- Prune in the winter when the trees are dormant. There are a few exceptions to this.
- Prune out all suckers or water sprouts - Suckers are the young shoots that grow at the trees base.
- Cut out all broken or diseased branches
- Cut out all crossing branches
- Cut out narrow crotches
- Thin branches to allow sun and air movement for fruit ripening
- When making cuts don't leave a stub, cut close to the trunk or branch
- Make pruning cuts just above and outward facing bud. In the spring this bud will grow away from the center of the tree.
- Always use sharp tools for clean cuts. Hand pruners for smaller branches, loppers for up to 1/2" cuts and a pruning saw for larger cuts

Pruning Styles:

There are three basic pruning styles: Open center, Modified central leader and Central leader. It is important to choose your pruning system when you first plant your fruit tree as the first cuts are very formative. If you are pruning an established fruit tree, prune to the established system.

-Open center pruning is primarily used for stone fruits such as peaches, nectarines and apricots. It can also be used for apples, cherries, and plums.

-Central leader pruning is used for apple and pear trees and often used for nut trees.

-The Modified Central Leader system has a main leader trunk and three or four lateral branches that are also given equal importance so these scaffolding branches are about the same size as the central leader.

Types of Pruning Cuts:

- **Thinning cuts** are used to remove an entire shoot or branch back to a lateral or scaffolding branch.

- **Heading cuts** are used to remove only the terminal portion of a shoot. This type of cut promotes the growth of lower buds as well as several terminal buds below the cut.

- **Large cuts** also known as bench cuts are used to remove vigorous, upright shoots back to side branches that are outward growing. Bench cuts are used to open up the center of the tree. They may also be used to take out excessive scaffolding branches left by improper pruning of young trees.

- **Careful pruning cuts** will help the tree to heal quickly. Pruning cuts should be flush with the adjacent branch without leaving stubs. Also, when large horizontal cuts are made, they should be slightly angled so that water does not set on the cut surface as this will cause rotting and disease.

Some people like to use tar or other compounds to close the wounds but I have found that a good clean cut flush with the base heals best on its own.

Tools of the trade:

Smooth, clean pruning cuts heal quickly and minimize the likelihood of rot and disease. Before making any cuts, become familiar with the various types of pruning equipment, their uses and limitations, and the basics of equipment maintenance. Be sure your equipment is properly adjusted, sharp and in good working order.

Pruning fruit trees is done to keep your trees healthy and easy to work in while pruning and gathering a bountiful harvest of large fruit.

Pruning is easy once you get the hang of it. If you would like to learn more about pruning fruit trees check out these [fruit tree pruning instructions](#) [1].

I am also offering some [great homesteading books](#) [2].

Cheers,

Farmer Dave

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- [1] <http://www.family-gardens.com/fruit-tree-pruning-instructions.html>
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