

PRUNING FRUIT TREES

For the best production of fruit trees, they should be pruned on a regular basis. Cherries, plums, and pears usually need pruning only every few years. Apple and peach trees should be pruned yearly. In general, trees twenty years or older can be pruned soon after the leaves drop in the fall and young fruit bearing trees in late winter or just prior to bud swelling in the early spring. Early spring pruning is highly recommended for all stone fruits such as cherries, plums, and peaches to reduce winter injury.

There are several reasons for pruning your fruit tree, and it is helpful to have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish before you start pruning. Thinning out a tree, especially in the center, encourages larger fruit and allows for better air circulation, sunlight penetration, and more thorough spraying. Pruning out undesirable growth such as suckers and unproductive branches, or dead and diseased branches, helps maintain the health and productivity of the tree.

If you are only interested in shaping the tree and reducing it to a manageable size, then consider some light summer pruning, particularly on the periphery and the upper crown of the tree. If the tree is very overgrown, it may take several summers of this pruning to get it to the desired size.

Regardless of the type of pruning being done, make all cuts close to a main branch or to the first cluster if you are doing summer pruning. It is also important not to paint over pruning cuts, as sealing the wounds artificially will encourage disease.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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