

Pruning Fruit Trees

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How fruit is born – Flower and fruit production does not develop directly from the limbs of fruit trees, but on spurs arising from the limbs. Apples and pears are borne on two year old spurs, easily identified as short twigs with wrinkled wood at the base. Buds are formed the previous season. Peaches, apricots and nectarines develop solely on one year old growth (wood that developed the previous season). Both sweet and tart cherries develop fruit production of spurs that are only one year old. Plums develop spurs on new wood and bear fruit the following year. Plums can develop from the spurs and somewhat from shoots.

When to prune – Prune in the fall after leaf drop is well underway, or in the spring before trees leaf out. Freeze damage to fall pruning cuts may require a second pruning the following spring to remove damaged tissue. Do not prune when tissue is frozen. Sweet cherries, peaches, apricots and nectarines may be pruned after harvest and after spring rains when there is less danger of spreading bacterial infection. Dead and dying material may be removed any time of the year.

Pears are easier to prune than apples as they have a more upright growth habit and are less inclined to branch. Cherries and prunes require relatively little pruning while peaches and apricots (which bear only on one year old wood) require more annual pruning than do apples and pears.

General pruning information

- Do not remove more than 1/3 of the crown per season.
- Generally branches that are growing straight up, straight down or towards the center can be removed.
- If branches are crossing or parallel remove one of the branches to prevent them from growing into one another.
- Prune to a wide crotch, greater than 45 degrees and closer to 90 degrees. This will provide a stronger branch and prevent splitting. Fruit will not develop on more upright branches.
- Prune for an open center to allow light and aeration to the center and lower branches of the tree. This will help prevent fungal diseases, and allows fruit on the lower crown to ripen. Otherwise most of the fruit will be at the top of the tree.

For a detailed pruning manual for fruit trees, please refer to “**Training and Pruning Your Home Orchard**” PNW400

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/sites/catalog/files/project/pdf/pnw400.pdf>