

Annual pruning

After the first few years of training, you'll need to establish a cycle of renewing the fruiting wood.

For this, you need to know where your tree carries its fruit (see the section 'Part 3 – Essential Plant Info' for each type of fruit).

You can tell new wood from old wood if you look closely at the new growth at the ends of branches in spring – it's a different colour from the wood further back down the branch, and there's often a clear line between the two.

Fruit on tips – *e.g. stonefruit, figs, persimmons*

- Bear fruit on the tips of 1- or 2-year-old wood.
- Thin out new shoots so they're well spaced, and head back weak shoots by two-thirds.
- In early summer, completely remove any strong new growth that will crowd or shade the lower branches.
- After the shoots have fruited, cut them right out to encourage the growth of new replacement shoots.
- Prune stonefruit in summer, to reduce the risk of diseases.

Prune each year

The aims of pruning are to:

- remove diseased, damaged and crossing branches
- control the tree's size and shape
- prevent shading and overcrowding inside the tree
- cut out some of the older 'worn out' fruiting wood to encourage the growth of new fruiting wood
- remove any suckers (shoots growing from the base)
- make spaces around the tree for placing a ladder if needed for picking and pruning.

Seal all cuts with pruning paint to reduce the risk of diseases.

Fruit on spurs – *e.g. apples, pears*

- Bear fruit mainly on fruiting spurs that develop on 2-year-old wood and last for several years.
- Cut out a quarter of the old spurs each winter, and head back older laterals to a bud close to the tree's framework.
- Either shorten some of the newer laterals, or tie them down to encourage the formation of fruit buds.

Main points to remember for success

- Prepare the planting hole beforehand, including plenty of organic matter.
- Plant the tree carefully and water, mulch and stake it if necessary.
- Find out where the tree carries its fruit, so you can choose the best shape and pruning methods to use.
- Train the tree when it's young.
- Once the tree is established, prune it each season to keep it healthy and productive.
- Pay attention to good orchard hygiene to reduce the risk of diseases.
- You don't have to get it exactly right!
- As long as you cut out any dead, diseased or damaged wood, and any branches that cross over one another, most trees will keep on producing fruit without too much fuss.
- If you accidentally cut off the wrong branch, or go away for a few years, you can still sort out the tree another season.
- It can take a while for a tree to recover from a major pruning. Just be patient ...