

TREE PRUNING

Jeff Raska/ Raincatcher's

- Remember the four d's: if a branch is dead, diseased, damaged, or damaged, prune it off immediately.
- We prune fruit trees for fruit and structure.
- Keep the center open: for sunshine to reach and ripen the fruiting wood.
 - Fruiting wood can be identified by looking for three buds (will become 2 flowers and 1 leaf). If only 1 bud is present, that bud will become a leaf.
 - Fruit always grows on last year's growth. In peaches, the fruit wood will be on branches with a red tint to them.
- Pruning do's and don'ts:
- Do's:
 - Anything growing towards the center, take it out.
 - Any branches that are crossing or touching each other, take one of them out.
 - Cut off competitive limbs (one will be shading the other).
 - Prune any branches growing straight up, or straight down.
 - Cut back new limbs so they don't get too heavy when the fruit fills out and matures. During the initial cut back, leave 5 buds. When the peaches are the size of a nickel, go back in to thin back to 1-3 fruit (pick the ones that develop normally and vigorously).
 - Cut back branches to a point where you see a branch that is curving up at 45 degrees- these will give a nice shape to the tree.
 - Cut $\frac{1}{4}$ " above the bud and at a 45 degree angle with the top of the wood pointing up (this will "pull up" the lower branches).
 - Trim off water sprouts- new rapid growing herbaceous branches the tree puts out to compensate for the lack of inside growth. Water sprouts will not leaf out or bare fruiting wood.
 - Prune out about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the wood, then step back and assess if more needs to be taken out. If a lot of pruning is needed, start by taking out the worst offenders.
 - Use the right tools for the right job in the right way, e.g., small hand held power saw for larger branches...and watch your head when they come crashing down!
 - For larger trees, use the three step method: pick an area 6" to away from the trunk and make a small cut on the bottom side of the branch, switch to the top of the branch and cut down to meet the bottom cut (this will take care of the main limb). Finally cut back/ clean up the last 4-6" of the remaining nub (but leave the branching collar).
- Don'ts:
 - Do not prune until the flowers begin to open up to be sure you know what is what.
 - Don't cut behind the branching collar (which is growth wood). If you cut past it, the branch will heal over; if you cut before it (closer to the main trunk), it will not heal, and disease may set in.
- Botany tid-bits
 - The apex of a branch has a hormone called auxin which provide dominance to the tips of branches by impeding growth of buds located lower on the limb. When you cut the apex, you remove the auxin, thus the dominance- so lower buds will develop and

thicken. Keep this in mind when you are trying to shape your fruit tree for easy picking (but don't forget to leave some for the birds!)

- Fruit specifics:
 - Peach trees will last 20-25 years. It is a soft, sweet wood that is susceptible to disease. Once petals fall off the flowers, spraying may begin. The plum weevil lays its eggs inside the developing fruit. With peaches and plums, a spray calendar must be followed for about 6 weeks to ensure the population is knocked down. A lot of fruit can be lost without the use of sprays.
 - Apple trees should be planted 15 feet apart and keep the circumference limited to 12 foot (so you can walk around the tree to prune).
 - Espalier apples:
 - prune back lower spurs, only leave spurs that stick up.
 - Prune the lower espalier level so they are not touching the upper level, better still, cut them down short because they will grow out during the season.
 - Space out spurs to prevent disease.
 - Apples fruit on the same wood year after year, so pick your favorite long term fruit spur and keep it!
 - Cut the end of the horizontally growing branch apex to prevent further horizontal growth when the branch reaches the end of the espalier structure.
 - Apples in Texas are smaller than the ones found in grocery stores, but are crisp!
 - Pears
 - Trees can also be pruned with the modified leader system, but it is not as attractive as an ornamental. The modified leader system will make the tree look like a Christmas tree.