

## Online Information

**City Fruit** provides info about pruning at [www.cityfruit.org](http://www.cityfruit.org) (see "Grow Fruit") and has trained volunteers who are willing to help prune residential fruit trees. Contact: [info@cityfruit.org](mailto:info@cityfruit.org)

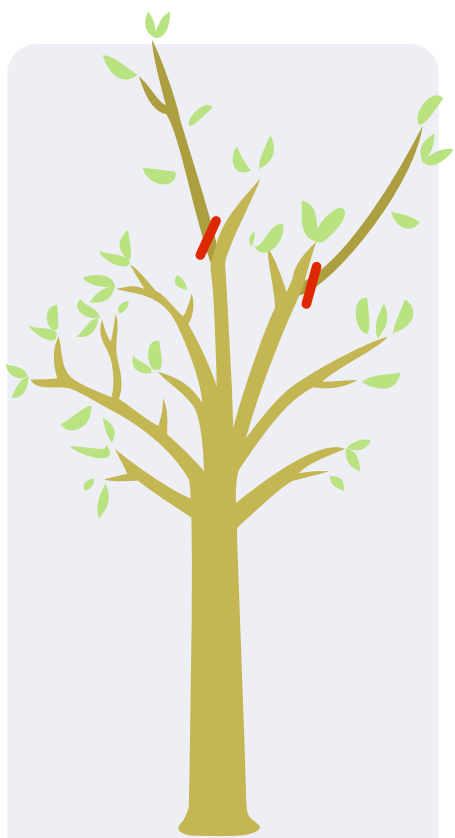
## Fruit trees are trees!

In most respects, fruit trees are pruned like other trees, for health and good looks. Special techniques can also be used to encourage fruit production.

## Pruning Basics

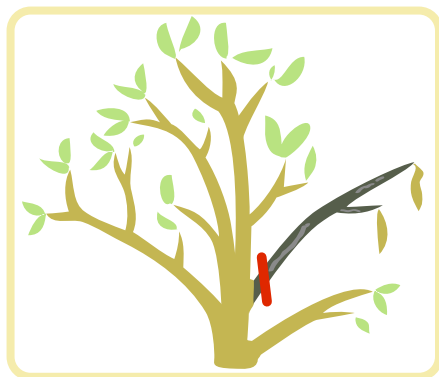
In addition to improving the tree's appearance, pruning a fruit tree increases light penetration and thus improves fruit quality. Pruning also increases air circulation, helping to reduce disease.

Start out by looking at your tree and remove the following branches first. Remember to remove each branch about a 1/2" above the place where it joins with a larger branch (don't cut into the branch 'collar').



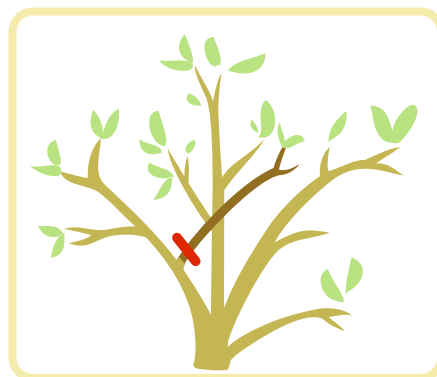
### Higher Branches

Thin back a few branches (even larger ones) toward the top, especially if they shade lower branches. This helps ripen fruit and keeps the tree from getting too big too fast.



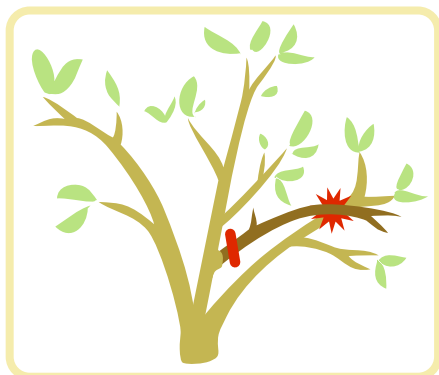
### Dead wood

Remove all dead and diseased branches.



### Interior Branches

Take out branches that grow inward, toward the center of the tree.



### Rubbing Branches

Remove branches that cross or rub against other branches.



### Suckers

Remove some, but not all, of the suckers (branches that grow vertically, often in a clump.) If you remove them all, they will come back.

## Resources

**The Plant Amnesty Referral Service** provides referrals to landscape professionals with the necessary skills and experience. Call 206-783-9813 and say you have a fruit tree.

**The Home Orchard Society** in Portland, Oregon has online series of articles on pruning fruit trees at [www.homeorchardsociety.org](http://www.homeorchardsociety.org).

**Sustainable Gardening: The Oregon-Washington Master Gardener Handbook** (WSU and OSU extension services, 2003) includes a chapter about pruning fruit trees, with diagrams and descriptions. (Not online, \$30)

### When hiring an expert

Make sure the person you hire understands how to prune fruit trees. Many general yard care companies, especially those that trim hedges and radically cut back trees, don't necessarily know about fruit trees. Even some arborists aren't experienced with fruit trees.



### Overpruning

Don't prune too much – no more than a quarter of the total leaf surface in any one year. And don't try to fix a tree in one year; if the tree needs a lot of work, do it over several years.

The following is excerpted from *Fruit Trees* by Cass Turnbull and published by Plant Amnesty. For copies of the original, see [www.plantamnesty.org](http://www.plantamnesty.org)

### Pruning to Produce Fruit

As branches get older, they stiffen into a more horizontal position. Buds growing along the branch form little side branches, called laterals, and on them are tiny ¼ -inch branches, called spurs. The spurs have fat flower buds (or fruiting buds) instead of skinny leaf buds. A fruit grower wants to promote these laterals and spurs.

Branches situated in a not-too-horizontal position will make more fruit buds, or spurs, than branches that are vertical or those that are completely horizontal (or those growing downward). You can pull or push new branches into a slightly horizontal position, or you can cut out the ones that aren't in the right position and leave the ones that are.

You can also encourage some, but not all, of the laterals to make spurs by heading them back (also called tipping back) to two or three buds. This works on pears and apples, but not on cherries. New dwarf varieties of apples, called 'spur type,' don't need to be pruned to set up spurs. They do it themselves.

### Pruning Errors

Topping is bad for any tree, including fruit trees. The suckers that shoot back up from a topped fruit tree are not only ugly, but they produce leaves instead of fruit.

### Old Trees

Old trees can be invigorated by heavy pruning to produce new wood and spur systems. There may be a temporary drop in fruit production. Don't try to fix a tree in one year. An older tree takes several years – and often professional help – to rehabilitate.

### Young Trees

Young trees (under six years) are pruned to develop strong, low framework branches. Go easy in the early years.

### Suckers

You may have a forest of suckers that are the result of previous bad pruning. If you remove all of them, they all come back. Leave some, shorten some to create a second story in the tree, and thin out the rest. (Remember: cut them back to almost where they join a larger branch.)

### When to Prune

Pruning is often done in winter, when the tree is dormant and the leaves are gone. It's easier to see the structure of the tree at that time. Summer pruning is also fine if the tree is vigorous and well-watered. Summer pruning is useful for spotting dead wood (no leaves) and can reduce the spread of fungal diseases. Summer pruning is harder on the tree, however, so go easy and don't prune during a drought.