

Saturday mornings at Shooting Star Nursery

Guide to Pruning, Planting, & training Fruit trees

Getting started:

- All deciduous fruit trees require some degree of pruning. Reasons for pruning include maximizing fruit quality and production, removing diseased or damaged branches, and controlling size and appearance of tree.
- Pruning is especially important in young trees. The first three seasons are critical to establishing a healthy, productive fruit tree.
- There are several times when pruning is required:
 - o When planting a bare root fruit or nut tree, pruning branches by up to one-half of their length will greatly increase the odds of the young tree breaking dormancy and thriving. The tree will more than make up for the pruned back branch length its first growing season.
 - o Summer pruning is the best time to control the height of your tree. Ideally, after fruit has been harvested, the tree should be pruned back to keep height in check.
 - o Winter pruning is the best time to prune fruit trees to enhance quality and health of fruit trees. While the tree is dormant, you can see the framework of the tree and remove damaged or diseased branches, crossing branches, crowded branches. The tree should be opened up enough to allow light to penetrate in for disease control and also to maximize fruit production.

At Planting:

- The first three seasons are critical to establishing a healthy tree. Not only is it important to prune back growth of bare root trees by up to one-half of branch length, but it is equally important to make decisions now which will impact the future structure of your tree.
 - o Most fruit and nut trees are ideally grown into an open vase structure. Instead of a dominant central leader, they are comprised of 3 or 4 main scaffold limbs. During the first years after planting, your job is to develop those limbs. They must be stout enough to hold up a crop of heavy fruit and situated so that maximum light can penetrate into the open top of the tree. Trees which benefit from open vase structure include most stone fruits, such as cherries and peaches.
 - o Some fruit trees can be grown in an open vase or with a central leader. Slower growing, less vigorous trees, such as some apples and European pears can be grown with a central leader.

- Some fruit trees can be grown on a structure in two dimensions, such as along a fence or the side of a garage. This technique is called espaliering and is ideal for people without a lot of space to grow a conventionally structured tree. Trees which produce fruit spurs - such as apples, pears, Asian pears, plums and cherries – are ideal candidates for espaliering.

Summer Pruning:

- Summer pruning is the best time to control the height of your tree.
 - The answer to how high your tree will get is 'however high you let it get'. Ideally, fruit trees are kept at a height so that fruit can be harvested while standing on the ground or a small step ladder. Spraying or pruning while balanced on a high ladder is difficult and dangerous.
 - Prune tree after fruit harvest. Taking out up to 50% of the new growth will reduce photosynthesis which will help slow down overall growth in the Spring. Pruning trees to control size in winter only stimulates the tree to grow rapidly once it comes out of dormancy. An additional benefit of pruning after the fruit has been harvested is that you can identify wood with fruit spurs and leave them intact. Some spurs such as Apple or Cherry can produce fruit from the same spurs for up to 10 years!
 - Especially vigorous trees such as peach trees may need to be pruned twice during the summer.

Winter Pruning:

- Winter pruning is the best time to prune fruit trees to enhance quality and health of fruit trees. Pruning to control size during winter can reduce fruit production and make a mess of the trees branching structure.
 - For all fruit trees, completely remove all branches that cross through the center of the tree. Also remove any dead, diseased or broken branches.
 - For aggressive trees such as peaches or nectarines, cut out approximately one-half of the previous seasons growth. The goal is to space the remaining stems as evenly as possible. Ideally the one year old stems should be spaced approximately eight inches apart. Remember that in peaches and nectarines, the 1 year old stems are the only part of the tree that will produce fruit. Of the remaining 1 year old stems, cut them back by approximately one-third.

- For trees which produce fruit on spurs, such as Apples, cherries, plums and pears, remove crossing branches and damaged branches as above. Thin new growth to allow an even distribution of branches, spaced approximately one foot apart. Apples and Asian plums can produce long, straight growths. Head these back by approximately two thirds. This will preserve the area where new spurs are likely to develop.

Shooting Star Nursery
3223 Taylor Rd.
Central Point, OR 97502
541-840-6453
www.roguevalleynursery.com

