

Pruning Fruit Trees

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Apples and Pears

Bushes and Standards

Apples and pears are pruned in the same way so this next section refers to both.

In the first four years some of the pruning may seem severe, but its purpose is to create a framework which will last for the life of the tree.

Bushes and standards are always pruned in the winter, on a day that the air is not frozen. If you start with a maiden tree you need to remove the main stem to a bud or lateral about 60-75cm (24-30 in) from the ground. The next year you need to choose four primary branches that have formed wide angles to the stem and that are evenly spaced out around the tree. Prune the more vigorous ones back by half and the rest by two-thirds, any other branches are to be removed. Always prune to an outward facing bud. Make sure when pruning that diseased, dead and weak branches are removed.

In year three the same will happen again, select a further four well placed new branches and cut vigorous ones by half and less vigorous ones by two thirds. None of the branches should be in the centre of the tree, this should be kept clear.

In the fourth year the branch framework has now been formed and the only thing that needs pruning are any laterals growing inside, which are cut back to 4 inches or nearest bud.

After the formative pruning is done the pruning is a lot less severe. You will also need to know whether your tree is **Spur bearing, Tip bearing or Partial tip bearing.**

Spur bearers produce fruit buds on two year old and older wood, where they are carried on short stubby shoots called spurs. Examples are Apples; Cox's Orange Pippin, James Grieve. Pears; Conference, Doyenne du Comice and Williams bon Chretien.

Tip bearers produce fruit buds at the tips of slender shoots made the previous year. Some spurs can also be produced. Examples are Apples Worcester Pearmain.

Partial Tip bearers produce both spurs and fruit buds at their tips. Pruning for these is done the same as for spur bearers. Examples: Apples Bramley and Discovery.

Spur pruning; in winter cut back new laterals to 4 to 5 buds. Then the next year prune the same lateral to a flower bud.

Tip pruning; Leave any maiden shoots less than 23 cm (9 in) long. Prune longer laterals to 4 buds.

Apples and Pears

Espalier and Cordons

Espalier consists of a central stem from which horizontal fruiting branches grow at intervals of 36-45cm (15-18 in) apart.

Cordons consist of a single straight stem with fruiting spurs along its length. These are planted either vertically or obliquely.

The age of the tree will depend on the amount of training needed. You can buy espaliers that have already been trained.

If you start with a maiden whip you will have to do all the training yourself. Put up the supporting wires where they are needed and plant the tree in its place. To create the first tier you need to remove the stem to a point where there are three buds just below the first wire. Select three good upper buds, the two lower buds pointing opposite ways in the direction of the wires.

During the summer the top bud will grow and will need to be tied to a vertical cane. The two side shoots need to be tied to canes at 45 degrees to the main stem. In the autumn the two side shoots will then be lowered, so that they run horizontally along the wire. Any other new shoots should be cut back to three buds. At the same time cut the main stem to three buds just below the second wire. During the summer the new shoots will be trained the same as the others the year before.

In autumn the new shoots are tied to the wire and the main stem cut to just below the third wire. This is repeated until each support wire has branches trained along it. At this point the main stem is pruned back in spring to a bud above the last tier.

During late summer any laterals that grow from the horizontal branches need pruning to three leaves above the basal cluster and any side shoots to one leaf. This produces spurs for fruiting.

Cordons are pruned similarly to espaliers once the basic frame is there. Plant the tree at 45-degree angle to the ground and tie the stem to a cane for support. Cut back any side shoots to four buds. Tie in the main stem as it grows up the cane. In late summer cut back any laterals longer than 23 cm (9 in) to three leaves. If there is significant growth after that prune the shoots again before leaf fall. Once the main stem has reached the necessary height it can be pruned back in may to a bud. Each year in late summer cut laterals longer than 23 cm (9 in) to three leaves and side shoots to one leaf.