

Apple and Pear Fruit Tree Pruning

If you want to keep in control of your fruit trees and to maximise the fruit potential of your trees then you need to prune them each year. Trained fruit trees such as cordons should be pruned in September while other free standing trees should be pruned in late autumn or early winter once all the leaves have dropped. If you miss this time then late winter just before the growing season begins when the tree is still dormant is acceptable. Do not prune the trees when there has been a frost or the temperature is near or around zero as branches can be frozen and when you prune them they a risk of them shattering and splintering rather than receiving a clean cut and allows an entry point for disease. (For countries not in the Northern Hemisphere or with different seasons will have to adjust the months accordingly)

Note: Do not prune your plum or cherry trees in winter due to this being the time that silver leaf disease can attack and do severe damage to these types of trees.

For general pruning all you need is a pair of sharp secateurs and a small pair of step ladders if needed or a pair of long armed pruners. If the tree is need of some serious pruning then a sharp pruning saw is also a must have. It is essential the tools give a clean cut rather than tearing otherwise you run a risk of disease. When pruning try to cut around a quarter of an inch (2cm) past a bud and at an angle. Pruning a fruit tree is easily done with one person unless you are having to climb high up on a step ladder, then for safety it is recommend you should have some one around to help keep the ladders steady.

Whether you pruning a standalone tree, a cordon or a fan the first thing you should remove is any broken or diseased branches. Next any branches which are rubbing against one another should be dealt with. Over a season when in leaf two branches rubbing together can do serious damage to each other again allowing the risk of disease. Remove which ever branch you feel is not required.

Once these initial tasks have been done then you need to begin tidying up the tree. Depending on the style in which you are growing your tree dictates what to do. Now while most apple trees people put in their gardens bear there fruit off side shoots, there are

varieties which do produce fruit from the tip of the branch. With these varieties unfortunately if you have one of these then you will have to sacrifice some of the fruit spurs to keep the tree in shape. (Note pear trees fruit both off spurs and tips). Now you have the basic pruning done begin pruning back any main grow spurs to around five or six buds. There will be branches that come off the side of new shoots at an angle of between 30 and 60 degrees and which are called a lateral. Leave these laterals intact because they will develop fruiting spurs for future seasons unless they are too long already or risk rubbing against other branches. The little stubby bits of growth are next year's fruiting spurs try and avoid damaging these otherwise you will end up with no fruit next season. Try to prune a quarter of an inch past a bud and at an angle. And remove any old fruit left hanging on the tree.