

Pruning Apples and Pears

Pruning is done for two main reasons; to encourage fruit production and to keep the tree or bush the desired size and shape.

The approach to pruning depends partly on the age of the tree.

Young trees

An initial decision must be made as to whether the tree is to be trained into one of the restricted growth form such as Cordons and Espalier or as one of the various shapes of free standing tree such as Standard, Dwarf pyramid, Bush or Spindle bush

Young trees should be pruned at least once in summer and once during the winter.

Summer pruning

First year

During the first year summer pruning aims at laying the foundations for the desired shape. Shoots not growing in the desired direction should be removed.

Branching can be encouraged by removing the terminal bud and part of the shoot. Tying branches down can also encourage branching, this leads to more fruiting spurs in later years as well as structural branches where needed.

Subsequent years

Pruning to ensure that the desired shape is achieved should continue, however side branches should not be removed completely but should be pruned to leave 2,3 or 4 of the leaves of the new growth. This initiates the development of fruiting spurs.



Mature fruiting spur

Two fruiting spurs developing following June pruning

Winter Pruning

Each winter, any time between leaf fall and the end of March

- (a) any branches crossing others should be removed,
- (b) the branches that are forming the main structure of the tree should be trimmed back by about six inches
- (c) all other branches should be cut back to a fruiting bud

Young restricted growth trees



3 year old triple stem cordons



Three year old espalier

Mature trees

Summer pruning

Once free-standing trees reach the desired size there is usually no need for any summer pruning but restricted growth forms should continue to be pruned in summer, as in earlier years.

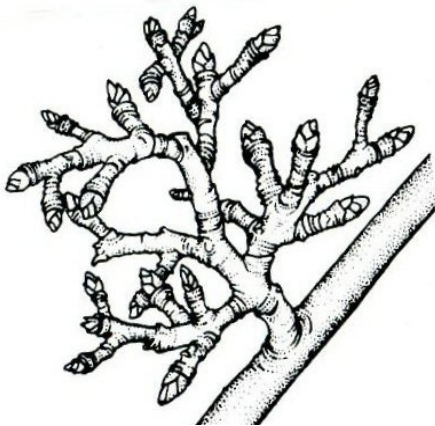
Winter pruning

Free-standing trees and bushes should (a) have all new stems cut back to a fruiting bud, (this is often not necessary on very mature trees)

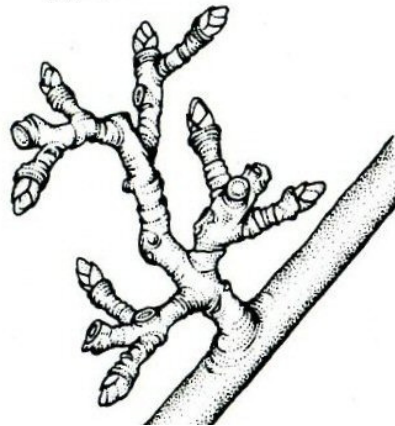
(b) have all branches crossing others removed,

If the tree is getting too big it can be cut back to size.

Restricted growth forms : all new shoots should be pruned back to a fruiting bud as in earlier years. Clusters of fruiting spurs can get overcrowded and some fruiting spurs should be removed,



Overcrowded fruiting spurs



Spurs after thinning

Neglected trees: renovation pruning

Old neglected trees and even those that have been pruned regularly reach a stage when more drastic ‘renovation pruning’ is needed. Some of these old trees still produce a good crop of apples but many of them are out of reach even with a ladder.

Renovation pruning can range in severity from the removal of dead and crossing branches only, all the way through to reducing the tree to a stump. If the pruning has been severe the new growth in the first few years should be pruned as for young trees.



Pear tree before and after renovation pruning to reduce height and removal of crowded branches



Tackling very a very old & neglected orchard

Regrown stump will become a productive small tree