



Grow Great Fruit Simple Pruning Guide for Vase-Shaped Trees

Establishment Pruning (When Planting):

1. Prune limbs to an outward facing bud at knee height. If there is only one limb, prune it at knee height, leaving at least 3 or 4 buds.
2. In the second year, choose the permanent limbs that will make up the tree shape, ideally 5–8 branches, evenly spaced around the tree (vase shape), not crossing over each other.
3. Remove unnecessary branches. Prune the top off ("head") each branch to an outward facing bud. This keeps the limb growing strongly at the end and helps establish correct tree shape. Remove branches in the centre of the tree (keep the vase empty).
4. In the third year, finish selecting the permanent limbs that will make the vase (if not enough were available in year 2). Head the main shoot ("leader") at the end of each branch, and remove competing shoots.



Maintenance Pruning:

1. The upright branches ("limbs") form the permanent shape of the tree; small horizontal branches ("laterals") growing from the limbs bear fruit and must be continually renewed.
2. Prune each limb in turn. First "define the leader" by choosing one shoot at the end of the branch pointing up and out, and removing any competing shoots. Moving down the limb, aim to have a balance of 1, 2, and 3 year old wood growing from the limb.
3. Remove any lateral that is more than 1/3 the diameter of the limb, or it will turn into another limb, creating branching too high in the tree, and shade out the bottom of the tree. This is called the 3:1 rule.
4. Remove laterals with a narrow angle to the limb (pointing upwards too much) as they will grow too strong, and compete with the limb.
5. Remove wood growing into the centre of the tree to keep the vase open and let light into the centre of the tree.
6. Don't remove too much wood in any one year.

GENERAL PRUNING PRINCIPLES:

1. First remove all dead and diseased wood from tree. If unsure if it is dead, check under bark—green is alive, brown is dead.
2. Hard pruning encourages the tree to produce wood, light pruning encourages the tree to produce fruit; therefore, prune as little as possible to maintain correct shape.
3. The strongest growth on any shoot comes from the end ("terminal") bud; wherever you make a pruning cut and remove the terminal bud, the 2 or 3 buds below it will usually put out new shoots.
4. The sap flows most strongly to the highest parts of the tree—the strongest growth occurs there.
5. Cuts should be clean and sharp, just above a bud facing out of the vase (don't leave stubs of wood with no buds).
6. Prune apricots, cherries, and almonds in summer (after they have finished cropping, before the leaves start to fall off). These trees are prone to gummosis and less likely to get infected if pruned in hot weather.
7. Prune apples, pears, peaches, and plums in winter when the trees are dormant (opinion varies on this).
8. Plant or transplant trees in winter when they are dormant, and prune them when you plant them (all varieties).
9. For grafted trees, remove suckers (shoots that grow from below the graft scar, or from the roots) each year when you prune the tree. Cut back either flat to the trunk, or as close to the ground as possible.
10. Encourage the tree to grow new fruiting wood close to each main limb (not long hanging laterals).