

# GREEN HARVEST

## Useful hints & tips for the garden

### Fruit Tree Pruning and Maintenance © Frances Michaels

Traditionally deciduous fruit trees such as pear, apple or peach were only pruned during winter. Early summer pruning has become common and has improved benefits for training young trees as it allows for smaller cuts with less stress to the tree. This is only commonsense, if you allow an undesirable branch to grow all summer, cutting it off in winter will mean a much greater wound for the tree to heal. Summer pruning can often be done just by 'rubbing off' unwanted buds with your fingers. Always avoid pruning on rainy days, as dry weather aids in healing the cuts.

Winter is still a good time to do fruit tree maintenance, such as removing deadwood or crossing branches. Begin by preparing your tools: sharpen your secateurs and loppers and apply linseed oil to any wooden handles. The correct tools make the job easier; the basics you need are: secateurs for small, precise cuts, loppers for removing suckers, especially thorny ones and a good quality pruning saw for the bigger branches. The only really safe ladder for outside work is a 3-legged orchard ladder. Safer still is keeping fruit trees pruned low, as the fruit will be within easy reach for foliar feeding and harvesting and there is less risk of a fall.

Remember your aim in pruning in a home garden is different to that of a commercial grower. It is essential you keep the tree small and manageable, so it is able to be covered easily to protect the fruit from birds, bats and possums; and in many areas, from fruit fly.

### How to begin:

- Step back from the tree and try to see the main branch structure that you need to develop. It is a good idea if you are new to pruning to make a habit of regularly stepping back as you work, to see the tree as a whole. Your aim is primarily thinning the branch structure rather than just shortening every branch.
- Begin by removing all dead or damaged wood, as well as suckers from below the graft. Clear away soil around the suckers and cut as low as possible to prevent a re-appearance.
- Next remove branches growing towards the centre of the tree. These are generally not fruitful and tend to harbour pests and disease. Over-crowding also prevents entry to the centre of the tree by insect-eating birds. Always remove branches that are rubbing together. Step back and take another look.
- Aim to prune out narrow-angled branch crotches, as these harbour pests such as borers and can break under the weight of fruit; a 60° angle where any branch joins the main trunk is best.
- Shorten back last season's growth; my general rule is 'if I can't reach it, I cut it off'. Tall fruit trees usually just end up feeding the birds. Most deciduous fruit trees can be kept under 3m in height.
- Finish up by removing loose bark with a wire brush; this will help destroy over-wintering two-spotted mite and codling moth grubs. Check for borer damage and destroy borers with a fine wire. Then apply Grafting and Tree Sealant which will stimulate rapid, healthy growth and will help to heal and seal any wounds. It helps build the long-term health and vitality of your fruit trees.

Ryset Tree Sealant - Grafting Sealant Ryset is a non-toxic, solvent-free, water based bitumen sealant. It forms a tough, flexible, waterproof and UV-stable film, which resists moisture penetration, bacteria growth and disease. Ideal for sealing plant grafts, protecting pruning wounds and filling/sealing cracks and wounds in trees.



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