



# Pruning Specific Fruits

**ALMONDS** sprout on year-old shoots, but the wood continues to bear for up to five years. Prune young almost rees to a vase shape. Your ultimate goal is to have a wide tree with an open top. Keep pruning the branches that are growing upward back to laterals and that are growing outward to create a wider branching habit.

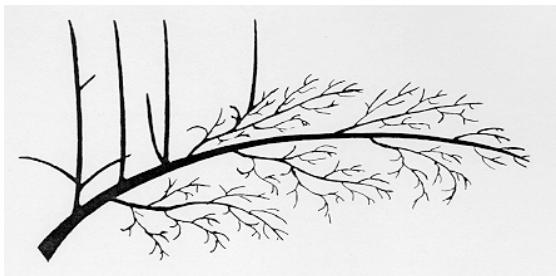
**APPLES** bear on long-lived spurs. The fruit forms at the tip of last year's spur growth, and the spur itself then grows a bit more, off to the side of the fruit. Each spur bears for 10 years or more, so don't tear it off when you pick.

Any pruning method will be suitable for standard full-size apple trees (over 20 feet tall) , but vase pruning is the method of choice to train standard apple trees. It will keep these naturally tall trees within bounds. After you have chosen your scaffold branches, cut them back one-third to encourage a strong branch system near the trunk.

In the second and third dormant season, reduce the length of all new growth by one-third and thin out to create a strong, evenly spaced framework of branches. These secondary scaffold branches will develop fruit spurs on their lateral branches. Pruning during this period would always be to a bud on the top of a branch that points outward. This will develop the vase shape.

With semidwarf and dwarf apple trees, modified central-leader or vase pruning can be used, but the central-leader system makes these trees stronger and earlier bearing. When planting the bare-root dwarf, cut back all branches, including the top about one-quarter, or about 5 to 10 inches. Make each cut to a strong outside bud.

For the second and third years, repeat the process to train the central leader up and the scaffold branches out, parallel to the ground. Most dwarfs will begin to bear the second and third years and will bear heavily thereafter. It is important to maintain the single upright central leader throughout the life of the dwarf tree. Be sure to remove any fruit that forms on this central leader because fruit formation will stunt the leader and another branch may become dominant.



Prune fruit trees to remove watersprouts (vigorous upright shoots that don't bear), along with twigs that grow downward.



When fruiting spurs on apple trees are located too closely together, remove the weakest one.

**APRICOTS** appear on the previous season's shoots and on short-lived spurs on older wood. Pruning is essential to apricot production for several reasons: It stimulates a certain amount of new growth for next year's crop; it keeps the tree open; and it prevents fruit from growing only high in the tree.

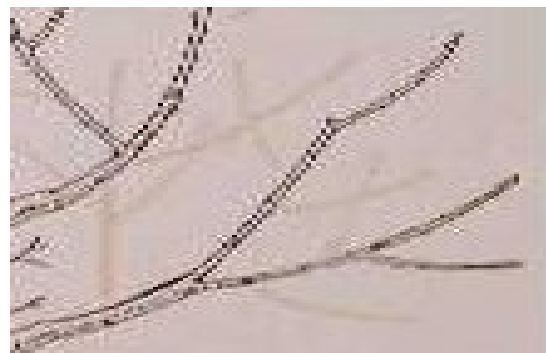
Apricot spurs produce fruit for two to four years and then need to be pruned out and replaced with younger wood. In pruning apricots, you need to head back long new whips by one-half and remove the oldest fruiting wood. Fruit may form in the second year, but don't expect a heavy crop until the third or fourth year..

**CHERRIES** bear on long-lived fruit spurs. Spurs on tree cherries begin to bear along 2-year-old branches and can produce for 10 years and more. Count on the first crops in the third or fourth years after planting. Bush cherries may bear sooner.

Sour cherry trees tend to spread wider and are considerably smaller than sweet cherries. The sour cherry can be pruned in a central-leader shape or, if you prefer to keep the tree smaller, to a vase shape. It's easy to keep a sour cherry tree under 12 feet with either pruning system.

Cherries need no thinning and little pruning after the first two season of growth. Sweet cherries may need heading back the first years to encourage branching.

Sweet cherries should be pruned to the central-leader system. Make sure that the leader or upper scaffold branches are not crowded and choked by lower scaffold branches growing upward. After the tree begins to bear, prune out weak branches and those that develop at odd angles or cross other branches. Head back the leader and upright side branches to no more than 12 to 15 feet so the mature tree can be kept at about 20 feet.



In modified central-leader pruning, cut growth on scaffold branches back by a third in the second and third dormant seasons.

**CHESTNUTS** bear on new wood. Pruning is not necessary for good fruit set. Train young trees to a central leader. Once that framework is established, trees require only occasional pruning to remove dead, weak, or poorly placed branches.

**CRAB APPLES** fruit on long-lived spurs, generally producing clusters of several fruits on each spur. Because crops are usually heavy, you can cut back new wood without losing anything. Prune young trees to a vase shape with three or four scaffolds. After the second year, you can leave these scaffolds alone or cut them back to maintain size.

**FIG TREES** bear fruit on new and year-old wood, so pruning is necessary to stimulate new growth each year for next year's crop. Prune figs to suit the growing situation. Different varieties grown in different ways. 'Adriatic' grows like a spreading shrub; do not head back this tree, for it will never grow tall or wide. Select scaffold branches at the first dormant period and prune to keep future branches off the ground. Each year remove any low branches that touch the ground or that interfere with picking.

'Kadota' is a vigorous grower that should be kept low and spreading. Head back new growth short in the middle of a tree and longer on the outside. When a tree reaches its mature shape, head back the new growth 1 or 2 feet each year.

Figs have two crops per year. The first blooms on the previous season's growth, and the second appears on new wood of the current season. When a tree is cut back to confine it, you usually lose most of the first crop. You also lose it in cold regions where winter does your pruning. Prune the young tree to an open shape in the first two years and pull off any suckers at the base. Shrub forms need no attention, except for regular removal of dead wood.

**FILBERTS** form on year-old wood, so as plantings age, remove older played-out stems. Head back remaining branches to encourage new growth; nuts are small and a large bearing surface is necessary for a good crop. Filbert trees usually start to bear at four years.

If you want a single-trunked filbert, train to the central-leader system. Remove all suckers as they appear. To train as a shrub, let some suckers develop.

**PEACHES** fruit on year-old wood, but once a peach is harvested, the section of branch on which it grew will never fruit again. Encourage new growth for replacement branches by pruning heavily every winter. Peach trees produce the greatest number of flower buds on healthy branches that grew the year before. Keep the branches that are the diameter of a pencil or greater and thin the smaller diameter twigs. You can head back the strong new branches by one-third to one-half if you want to keep the tree small.

Most newly planted young peach trees are pruned to the vase shape. They should be pruned moderately. Your ultimate goal is a wide tree with an open top 12 or 13 feet high. As it grows, cut branches that are growing upward back to laterals that are growing outward. This creates a much wider branching habit.

When the tree is maturing (about 6 to 8 feet tall in the west and Midwest and 10 to 12 feet tall in the east and south), start severely cutting back the new growth on the top of the tree, being sure to maintain the open center that will admit light to the lower inside branches. In general, pruning should be lighter on young bearing trees than on older ones.

**PEARS** bear on long-lived spurs, much as apples do. These spurs last a long time if you're careful not to damage them when picking fruit.

Prune the young pear tree to the central-leader system by selecting five or six scaffold branches over a two-year period. Since it's characteristic of pears to grow upright, don't make too many heading-back cuts, for they will promote too many upright shoots. Also, use wood or wire spreaders to train the tree branches to grow at wider crotch angles. If you want a small pear tree, buy a dwarf; don't try to make a standard tree smaller by heavy pruning.

The pear is very susceptible to a bacterial disease called fireblight, especially in the soft succulent growth that results from heavy pruning, so be careful about heading back or thinning shoots on mature trees. Once fireblight takes hold, little can be done except to remove infected growth. It is important not to over fertilize pear trees because heavy fertilization will stimulate an abundance of new vigorous growth that is more susceptible to fireblight infection.

A pear is as trainable as an apple, and a trained tree can last 75 years. Options to consider are to plant pears as espaliers, train them to 45-degree angles for an informal hedge, or plant them in tubs as a single cordon or on a trellis.

**PECANS** bear on new wood, and little pruning is needed other than topping to limit tree size.

Train young pecan trees to a central-leader framework, heading back any overly vigorous laterals that would divert energy from upward growth. Trees will start to bear nuts five to eight years after planting.

**PERSIMMONS** bear fruit on new wood. It will set on the outer portion of a naturally shaped tree. Thinning fruit is unnecessary but will help keep lawn trees neater.

Persimmons are often allowed to grow naturally, forming globe-shaped trees up to 25 or 30 feet high. They can be pruned in spring to keep them smaller, although little pruning is necessary. Prune the young tree to three widely spaced scaffolds and leave it alone thereafter, or control it by cutting each year to strong lateral branches, removing as much growth as necessary to maintain the size you want.

Persimmons can be trained as espaliers or into hedges. In pruning an espalier, cut off enough of the previous year's growth to expose the most interesting lines of the plant.

**PLUMS** fruit on spurs on older branches with the heaviest production on wood that is two to four years old.

The two main plum varieties are European and Japanese. European plums need only occasional thinning and heading once the tree shape has been formed. Japanese plums overgrow and overbear. They are particularly prone to branch splitting when mature and bearing heavy crops. Cut back the long whips and thin fruit when it reaches thumbnail size, leaving about 4 to 6 inches between remaining fruits.

Remove one-third of the new wood on Japanese plums each year by thinning and heading back. This heavy pruning is necessary to produce larger fruit. Keep long, thin branches headed to give the tree a stubby, wide shape. When the fruit spurs on a branch have borne for five to six years, select a new branch from lateral shoots on this branch. The next year, remove most of the old branch, cutting it off just above the selected lateral.

**POMEGRANATE** fruits form on the current year's growth, so you can prune them back heavily without loss of flowers or fruit. Although they do not require pruning for good fruit set, you can prune pomegranates to fountain-shaped shrubs or as single- or multiple-trunk trees.

**QUINCE** fruits on new wood and become the large, heavy fruits are borne singly at branch ends, it is wise to head back any overlong branches to prevent limbs from breaking or sprawling under the weight of the crop. To grow as a small tree, prune to a vase shape. Otherwise let multiple stems grow from ground level and select the strongest, best-placed ones for framework. Roots are shallow and will sucker if damaged by soil cultivation. Little pruning is needed in subsequent years, other than making cuts to maintain a good shape.

**WALNUTS**, like pecans, bear on new wood and need minimal annual pruning after the initial shape is established. Some heavy-bearing varieties require pruning to thin them out. Walnuts are usually trained to a modified central-leader with five or six main lateral branches.