

Bluestem Breezes
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Pruning Fruit Trees

A great time to prune fruit trees is upon us! The weather is predicted to be beautiful this week.

With temperatures in the 40s and 50s, I am searching for reasons to be outside. Pruning when temperatures are below 20F is not advisable due to possible injury. (I would also advise in below 20F temperature to consider reading a publication on pruning while sipping hot chocolate by a warm fire. I think you'll find this far more enjoyable than actual pruning in those low temperatures anyway.)

It is important to prune before dormant sprays are applied to avoid pruning out sprayed wood and discarding it. Also, you are more likely to get total coverage of limbs, branches and shoots after you have pruned. Prune older trees first because older, larger wood tolerates lower temperatures than young trees with small diameter wood.

Maintenance pruning, if carried out on a regular basis, should remove undesirable growth to prevent the need for paying a professional later down the road. This maintenance pruning will take care of the following:

- Dead or diseased and other unsightly branches.
- Water sprouts growing near the base of the tree trunk or in the tree.
- Any branch or part of it that grows toward the center of the tree.
- Any cross branch which causes rubbing and consequent damage to the bark.
- Narrow V crotches should be eliminated through early corrective pruning by eliminating one of the branches.
- Competition with central leader if more than one leader develops in a tree that normally has one single stem. The competing branch should be pruned out to restore dominance to the main stem.
- Branches that are likely to interfere with telephone or electric wires should be thinned out. As we remember previous ice storms, chances for multi-day electric power outages may be reduced with tree pruning today!
- Prune out branches that cut off desirable summer breezes.
- Remove lower branches to open up an attractive view. Remove no more than one branch or part of a branch at a time before studying the result, because often little pruning is needed to open up a view.
- To control size.
- Sometimes, the removal of lower sweeping branches is necessary to allow more sun on the turf. One should be careful not to prune too drastically and cause sunscald on the now bare trunk.
- Overcrowded tree conditions may call for thinning of side branches or removal of trees to allow for natural form on remaining specimens.
- Trees on construction sites or near ditches, etc., where part of their roots have been destroyed benefit from thinning and pruning to allow for the loss of roots. Of course, it would be much better not to destroy the root system of good trees and plan around them, making existing trees part of the new landscape.

Remember, correct pruning is as important for the long life of a tree as is disease and insect control.

For further information, visit the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821) to pick up KSU Horticulture Reports “All About Pruning” and “Pruning Fruit Trees”. For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.

Mark your calendars: KSU Cattlemen’s Day is Friday, March 1st. Tractor Safety Training is June 4th - 5th in Wamego.