

Bluestem Breezes
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Pruning Fruit Trees

With beautiful weather continuing, now may be the perfect time to be outside pruning those fruit trees. This week, K-State Specialist Ward Upham discusses appropriate methods for pruning:

Fruit trees can be pruned from now through March as long as the wood isn't frozen. Following are some general recommendations on pruning mature fruit trees, followed by more specific instructions on each species. If you have young fruit trees, please contact the Extension Office for specific instructions.

General Recommendations

- Take out broken, damaged or diseased branches.
- If two branches form a narrow angle, prune one out. Narrow angles are weak angles and tend to break during wind or ice storms.
- Take out all suckers. Suckers are branches that grow straight up. They may originate from the trunk or from major branches.
- If two branches cross and rub against one another, one should be taken out.
- Cut back or remove branches that are so low they interfere with harvest or pruning. If cutting back a branch, always cut back to another branch or a bud. Do not leave a stub.
- Cut back branches to reduce the total size of the tree, if necessary.
- Thin branches on the interior of the tree.

Follow the steps above in order, but stop if you reach 30% of the tree. For a short video on pruning, see <http://www.hfr.ksu.edu/p.aspx?tabid=980&cat=Fruit&itemid=64&cmd=view#64>

Specific Instructions

Peach and Nectarine: Peach and nectarine require more pruning than any other fruit trees because they bear fruit on growth from the previous year. Not pruning results in fruit being borne further and further from the center of the tree allowing a heavy fruit crop to break major branches due to the weight of the fruit. Prune long branches back to a shorter side branch.

Apple: Apples tend to become overgrown if not pruned regularly. Wind storms and ice storms are then more likely to cause damage. Also, trees that are not pruned often become biennial bearers. In other words, they bear a huge crop one year and none the next. Biennial bearing is caused by too many fruit on the tree. Though pruning helps, fruit often needs to be thinned as well. The goal is an apple about every 4 inches. Spacing can vary as long as the average is about every 4 inches.

Cherry, Pear, Plum: Light pruning is usually all that is needed. Simply remove branches that are causing or will cause a problem according to the general recommendations above.

For additional information, contact the Extension Office (215 Kansas, Courthouse, Alma; kamayer@ksu.edu; 765-3821). For Bluestem Breezes archives, check out wabaunsee.ksu.edu.