

Pruning any fruit tree

- prune apples and pears in winter for growth and in summer for fruit
- never prune off more than 25% per annum.
- prune quinces in winter but only lightly
- always prune plums, cherries etc in summer between May and September. Remove rubbing and diseased branches only.

Restorative pruning of bush and standard apples and pears

- Let there be light and air.
- There are 4 parts to a tree:
 - the rootstock
 - the stem or trunk which supports the framework
 - the supporting framework and finally
 - the fruiting branches which arise from this framework
- The supporting framework stays with the tree all its life
- The fruiting branches are pruned on a routine basis
- Spread the restorative pruning over 3-5 years to avoid too vigorous regrowth.
- Firstly, remove any obvious dead and dying wood then
- Start at the base - anything growing from the base of the tree is rootstock. Cut it off.
- Remove any unwanted shoots from the stem. A twig 12 inches from the ground will be 6 inches thick in 10 years time but will still be only 12 inches from the ground. Look out for suitable young shoots at the top of the stem which would make useful supporting branches.
- Try to identify 5–8 main branches radiating out from the head of the tree. These are the supporting framework. Any main branches above this framework can be removed.
- Go with the tree and let it dictate what constitutes the 'basic framework'
- Remove any branches that cross over from one side of the tree to the other and water shoots which are strong shoots growing from the tops of the radiating branches. Cut them right off.
- That's probably enough for the first year.
- Apples and pears fruit best on fairly young growth. After 6-8 years, the fruiting branches become long and congested, and the fruit rather small and scabby. Look along each main branch and remove a few of the biggest fruiting branches. Leave about a 1 inch stub. From this stub, new shoots will grow. Remove any water shoots.
- Keep doing this every year. After about 6-8 years you should have 'renewed' all the fruiting branches and be starting again

This is called 'regulated pruning' and works for most apples and pears.

Pruning small bush tree, cordons, espaliers and fans

Smaller spur-bearing trees can be spur-pruned. This means cutting back *all* the fruiting branches to 2 fruiting buds or, if there are no buds, to about 4 inches to stimulate buds to form. This is usually done in late July or early August but can be done in the winter. Big old spurs can be cut back to 1 inch on a regular basis to stimulate new spurs to form.

Tip-bearing varieties should be lightly pruned in the same way as large trees.

Formative pruning

Standard, half-standard trees

- These are usually grown as 'open-centred' trees.
- By definition standard trees have a trunk height of 6-8 feet, half-standards 4.5 feet and bush trees 3.5 feet.
- Allow the maiden tree to grow more or less as it wants to until 5-8 strong, well-spaced side branches have formed above the desired trunk height
- Cut off the centre-leader and any unwanted shoots on the trunk.
- Use 'regulated pruning' from then on

Bush trees

- Maiden trees are usually tipped at about 3 feet to force 3 or 4 strong side-shoots to form at the correct height.
- These side-shoots are then cut back by one third to one half their length in the winter to create more a goblet shape with 5-8 radiating branches.
- Use 'regulated' or 'spur' pruning from then on.

Delayed open-centre (or centre-leader) trees

- This is a specialised commercial pruning system for semi-vigorous trees. It is highly productive but requires specialised pruning techniques.
- The maiden tree is tipped at about 9 inches above the required trunk height.
- In February, when growth is just starting, the 2nd and 3rd buds are removed. This encourages the 4th and 5th buds will grow into much flatter branches and these are selected to form the first tier.
- The centre-leader from the 1st bud is encouraged to grow upright.

- The following winter and providing this centre-leader has grown well (min 20") then it is tipped back by one third. Young growth on the side-shoots is cut back by one third to one half.
- The pruning is repeated each winter until the required final height is reached when the centre-leader is cut out entirely.