

# General Care of Fruit Trees

There are many good reasons to grow your own fruit trees – the huge choice of varieties not found in stores, money savings, control over which and how many sprays are used, trees provide ornamental features such as blooming as well as being productive, and it is fun! It isn't always easy, dealing with diseases, bugs, and those ever-threatening late frosts that kill buds, but when you sink your teeth into one of those fresh-off-the-tree Redhaven peaches that YOU grew, in YOUR own yard, there's no greater prize in gardening.

## Pollination and Variety Selection

Many fruit trees are listed as being self-pollinating, or self-fruitful, while other varieties need two or more trees planted together in order to cross-pollinate. See the handout "About Pollination" in order to help you decide which varieties of fruit trees to plant. Apples and pears generally require two or more varieties with overlapping bloom times. Many stone fruits (fruits with a large, hard seed, or pit, such as peaches, nectarines, cherries) are self pollinating. Although self-pollinating trees do not require a pollinator, they will produce fruit more heavily if one is nearby. For best pollination, plant your trees close together in groves. Dwarf varieties can be planted 8'-10' apart, while standard sized trees will perform well when planted 12'-18' apart.

## Site Selection and Planting

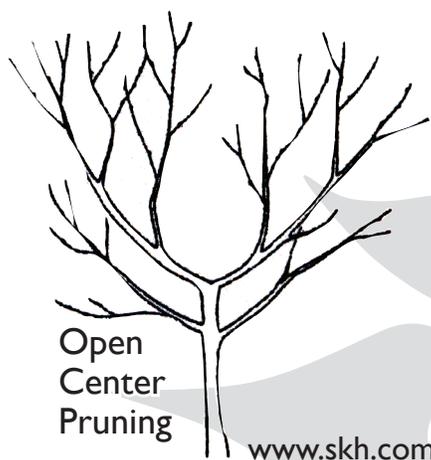
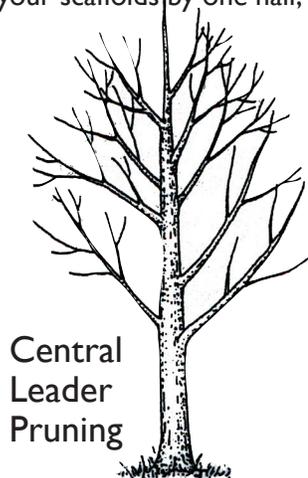
All fruits require full sun, and well-drained, rich soil. Sun not only encourages better fruiting, but it also helps to quickly dry off the dew and rain that can encourage fruit to rot. When planting fruit trees, it is important to incorporate organic matter, such as compost, Stauffers Premium Planting Mix, or well-rotted manure into the soil. Fruit trees prefer a slightly acidic soil, with a pH of between 6 and 6.5. Soil test kits can be purchased to determine the soil's acidity. After planting, cover the ground with 2"-3" of bark mulch (taking care to keep it an inch or two away from the trunk) and keep your new trees well watered. Water deeply once or twice a week by laying a hose at the base of your tree and letting the water trickle out slowly to deeply water the root ball.

## Feeding and Pruning

We suggest a high phosphorus fertilizer two to three times during the first growing season. In the second and following years, use a balanced fertilizer, once a year, preferably in June.

Apples and pears are best pruned to the "central leader" system. This means pruning so that there is one main, straight trunk from top to bottom. Allow three or four large or "scaffold" branches to grow from different points around the trunk at three different levels. Allow about 18" between each of the three levels.

Stone fruits are best pruned to the "open center" system, which gives you a tree that looks vase-shaped. Instead of having a straight, main trunk, stone fruits have a short trunk with three or four main branches or "scaffolds" coming out of it. Select three or four branches that are coming off the trunk at different angles somewhere between 18" and 30" off the ground. Cut off all other branches, including those below 18". Then cut off any section of branches growing above your top scaffold. In the second year, allow two or three side branches to grow out of each of the scaffolds, preferably somewhere near the base of the scaffold. Once you have selected these side branches, cut them back by one half, cut back your scaffolds by one half, and remove all other branches.



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In ensuing years, all you will need for your fruit trees will be light prunings that remove dead or diseased branches, inward-growing or weak branches, and any suckers growing from the base of your trees. You also may want to thin out any overly dense areas to help maintain the tree's shape as well as maintain good air flow that will help discourage disease. In addition, to thinning branches, fruits should be thinned out to encourage bigger, better fruits rather than a lot of tiny fruits. When fruit is about a half-inch in diameter, pull off excess small fruits until you have about one fruit for every 6"-8". This is not necessary for cherries

## Insect and Disease Control

There are many bugs and diseases that target fruit trees, and thus make it very difficult to grow great fruits without any spraying at all. You can reduce spraying, depending on how many imperfections you are willing to tolerate. Most of the insects and diseases can be controlled only by preventing them or catching them early. If you wait until you see a problem, it is usually too late to effectively control it. Sprays can be applied with either a hand-held pump sprayer or a hose-end sprayer. The charts below list suggested times for what to spray when to control bug and disease problems.

### Apple and Pear Spraying Schedule

<b>Spray 1</b> - Dormant oil in late February to early March, before new growth starts. (Right after pruning is ideal.)
<b>Spray 2</b> - Fruit Tree Spray (combined insecticide and fungicide) at first sign of pink coloring of buds.
<b>Spray 3</b> - Fruit Tree Spray at 'full pink' stage, just before blossoms open. Do NOT spray anything while trees are in bloom, so you don't kill or repel your pollinating friends, the bees. (Only exception: If you want to control Fire Blight on pears, apply two sprays of 'Fire Blight Spray' seven days apart while the tree is in bloom.)
<b>Spray 4</b> - Fruit Tree Spray when at least 90 percent of the spent flower blossoms have dropped.
<b>Summer Sprays</b> - Starting in mid-June, spray at intervals of roughly two weeks until mid-August.

### Stone Fruit Spraying Schedule

<b>Spray 1</b> - Dormant oil in late February to early March, before new growth starts. Lime Sulfur also should be used.
<b>Spray 2</b> - Fruit Tree Spray (combined insecticide and fungicide) when buds are pink and about ready to open.
<b>Spray 3</b> - Captan (fungicide) during bloom to prevent brown rot. Do NOT spray any insecticide during bloom, or you'll kill the bees that do the pollinating!
<b>Spray 4</b> - Fruit Tree Spray when spent flower blossoms have dropped.
<b>Spray 5</b> - Fruit Tree Spray every 10 to 14 days until one week before harvest.
<b>Spray 6</b> - Captan one week before harvest to control brown rot.
<b>Spray 7</b> - Cherries only - Fruit Trees Spray immediately after harvest to control leaf spot and Japanese beetles.