

Prune Those Fruit Trees

It's time to get those fruit trees pruned to insure to encourage good fruit yield. Pruning aids in disease control, promotes fruit yield, and enables you to manage a tree's size.

The following are considerations for properly pruning a fruit tree:

- 1- Remove root suckers from the base of the tree.
- 2- Remove all dead, broken, diseased, or insect-infested branches.
- 3- Remove branches that turn downward as fruit load will only cause these to touch the ground.
- 4- When limbs are closer than 24 inches, choose the inferior branch and remove.
- 5- Can reduce height of tree by cutting back upright branches to a branch growing toward outside.
- 6- Remove suckers or watersprouts growing from top of branches.
- 7- Eliminate branches that touch.
- 8- After larger cuts are made, thin the tree.
- 9- Try to not remove more than ¼ of tree in one year.

Proper pruning will also aid in pest control. Dr. David Lockwood, the UT Extension Fruit Specialist, says pruning allows better sunlight, air movement and spray coverage. Removing old Fireblight damage will help control infection for the coming growing season. Fireblight-damaged wood, which will be shriveled and dark, should be cut out removing wood several inches past the point of infection. Fireblight infections can often be identified by the limb taking the shape of a shephard's crook on the the tip. Pruner sterilization will be important in the case of trees that have had fireblight infection. A bleach solution or a commercially available disinfectant may be used between cuts where reinfection is a concern.

Lockwood also suggests that trees have the potential of producing a larger crop than they are able to sustain, resulting in smaller and poorer quality fruit. Trees often get in a cycle of producing a large crop one year and hardly any at all the next. Dormant pruning removes some of the fruit buds as they are formed the previous growing season. According to Lockwood, some thinning of the fruit may have to be done during the growing season as dormant pruning may not be adequate.

Pruning can also be a tool to manage tree size. If a tree is too large, we cannot spray, prune, harvest fruit, etc to properly manage the tree. Now, don't get the idea that you can manage a standard size apple tree to the same height that you can manage a semi-dwarf or dwarf tree, as this would most likely remove much or all of the fruit bearing wood of the tree.