

Pruning Fruit Trees — Part 2

This is the second of a three part series.

Fruit Tree Training Systems

There are many training systems for fruit trees, and each system has its own advantages and disadvantages. For homeowners, the modified leader system is the most versatile and the easiest to learn. Any fruit tree, whether standard sized or dwarf, can be trained to the modified leader system.

In training fruit trees, remember these two basic concepts.

- Excessively heavy pruning delays fruiting and branch development.
- Branches spread at a 45–55 degree angle with the main trunk are stronger and produce more fruit than branches with narrower branch-trunk angles.

Working with Unbranched One-Year Trees or 'Whips'

Unbranched, one-year old fruit trees are often called 'whips,' because they have a single straight trunk with no side branches and resemble a riding

whip. After planting a new whip, cut the top of the trunk back to encourage buds low on the trunk to sprout and develop. This results in a tree with branches low enough for easy harvesting.

Head the whip back to the following height:

- Standard trees, 44 inches
- Semi-dwarf trees, 36–40 inches
- Dwarf trees, 29–30 inches

Assuming the tree is planted in spring, after completing this initial pruning required at planting, the tree will not be pruned again until the following March when the selection of scaffold branches begins.

Selecting Scaffold Branches

The lowest scaffold branch should be 20–24 inches above the ground, so remove any lower branches or shoots from the trunk. Choose the most vigorous, upright-growing branch at the top of the tree to become the central leader.

Among the remaining branches, remove those that form narrow angles, less than 45 degrees, with the trunk. Select for permanent scaffold branches 2 or 3 well placed branches that

are spaced evenly around the trunk, like the spokes of a wheel, and are vertically spaced at least 6 inches apart. Remove all remaining shoots or branches.

If any remaining scaffold branches compete with the central leader in height, then head back or shorten them to about half their length by making a slanted cut just above an outward facing bud.

Apply branch spreaders to the scaffold shoots, if needed, to widen the trunk-branch angle. The central leader shoot should be two times as tall as the longest side shoot, so prune any long lateral branches back so they are a foot shorter than the tip of the central leader when held in an upright position.

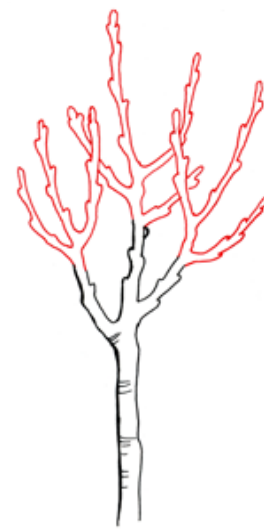
Second Year Pruning

During the second dormant season following planting, maintain the dominance of the central leader shoot by cutting any excessively-long lateral branches back below the height of the central leader. Choose two or three additional scaffold branches at the top of the tree.

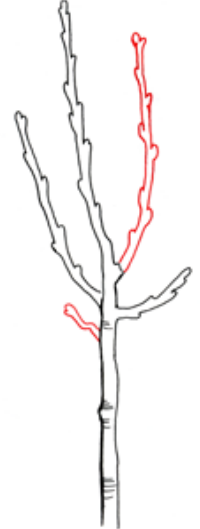
Secondary shoots may have started to develop on the main

Types of Pruning Cuts

Two basic types of pruning cuts are used when working with fruit trees, regardless of the tree's age.



HEADING BACK CUTS are made to an outward facing bud or branch, with the goal of encouraging lateral growth or branching.



THINNING CUTS are made to remove entire shoots or branches. Branches with weak branch attachment, poor branch-trunk angles, or damaged branches would all be candidates for removal.

scaffold branches. Treat each of the main scaffold branches as a small tree, in regards to choosing secondary scaffold branches. Don't allow the secondary shoots, or laterals, of the scaffold branches to compete with the leader of that branch; so head

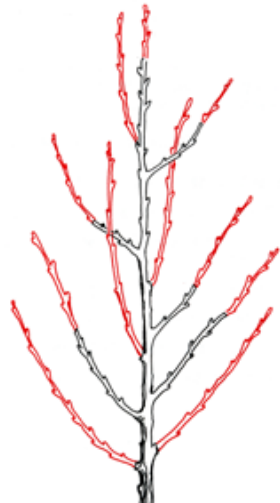
back any extra long secondary lateral branches. Also, don't prune out the short fruiting branches known as spurs.

Source: UNL Extension publication "Pruning Fruit Trees," EC78-1233B



PRUNING YOUNG TREE WHIPS

Heading back cuts are made to young tree whips to encourage lower branching, which results in the development of scaffold branches lower to the ground that are easy to harvest.



PRUNING YOUNG TREES

Young branched trees should be pruned to remove branches with narrow trunk angles, poor trunk placement, or those that compete in height with the central leader shoot.



OVERHEAD TREE VIEW

Select permanent scaffold branches that are evenly spaced around the tree's trunk, like the spokes of a wheel. Alternate branches around and up the tree's trunk. Avoid having two or more major branches originating at the same height on the trunk.



SECOND YEAR PRUNING

Maintain dominance of the central leader shoot by either removing or heading back any excessively long lateral branches below the height of the central leader. Heading back cuts can also be used to encourage branching of long side shoots. Continue to remove shoots with narrow branch angles or poor placement.

Growing Nuts: Webinar Feb. 9, Seminar Feb. 23

Hundreds of farmers, both large and small grow nut crops in Nebraska. Black walnuts and pecans are favorites, but chestnut and hickory are specialty crops that can also bring income to landowners.

Webinar, Feb. 9

Heartland Nuts 'N More cooperative and the Nebraska Forest Service are presenting a webinar, "Grow More Nuts in Nebraska?" on Thursday, Feb. 9, 7–8 p.m. to introduce eastern Nebraska acreage owners to the possibilities of growing nuts as a crop. This Internet program requires no special computer equipment; the only requirements are an Internet connection (not dial-up).



Pecans in shuck split stage

The program will include interviews and discussion with Nebraska growers about their orchards. Learn the very basics of growing nuts.

Register at <http://marketplace.unl.edu/extension>. There is a nominal \$1 registration fee. For more information about the webinar, contact Heartland Nuts 'N More.

Seminar, Feb. 23

NeNGA & Heartland Nuts 'N More are sponsoring an in-depth seminar, "Nut Orchard Planning, Planting, Care, and Harvesting" on Thursday, Feb. 23, 7–9 p.m. at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln. You may register at <http://marketplace.unl.edu/extension>

(there is a nominal \$1 registration fee) or by calling 402-788-2717. No cost at the door.

If you want to plant just a couple nut trees or an orchard, you will find this seminar informative.

Everyone has different expectations and goals when planting nut tree seedlings. This seminar will introduce you to most aspects of what it takes to accomplish your goals and expectations. There will be professional growers on hand to answer your questions.

Topics include:

- Planning phase will cover setting realistic goals, understanding an orchard environment, and the tasks to meet your goals so you will be successful.
- Planting phase will cover planting consideration and seedling selections.
- Caring phase will cover tasks required to bring a seedling to a productive, producing nut tree.

- Harvesting tasks will cover harvesting techniques, processing, and marketing your nuts.
- A seedling cost-share program will also be introduced.

For more information about the live seminar, contact NeNGA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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