



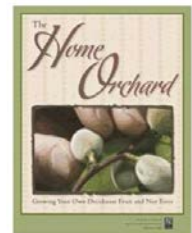
NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Home Orchard Pruning (1/25/2020)

by Jane Bodine, UCCE Master Gardeners

After I began my first training class in Master Gardening a few years ago, I became fired up about home gardening, and decided to plant a small home fruit tree orchard. Now I have peaches, plums, nectarines, apples, pears, cherries, apricots, persimmons, pomegranates, citrus and avocados to keep me healthy and wealthy with homegrown fruit for the whole year!

I would like to discuss the pruning I did of the deciduous fruit trees (trees that lose their leaves in the winter). I will not be discussing the pruning of citrus trees, as they keep their leaves in the winter and require different pruning techniques. A resource I appreciate a lot is the University of California Publication: *The Home Orchard, Growing Your Own Deciduous Fruit and Nut Trees*. <https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/Details.aspx?itemNo=3485>



I did the pruning in the winter because most of these trees have their carbohydrates stored in their roots now, and it is easy to see the trees' framework without leaves. I pruned most of the trees in December. However, I waited until January to prune the apple trees, since apples lose their leaves later.

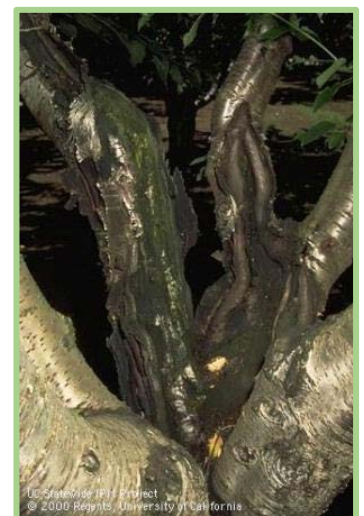
When these deciduous trees were planted, their main trunks were cut off at 18-24 inches high. The next year, I chose three or four scaffold branches that were evenly distributed around the trunks, and several inches apart vertically. Next, I cut off all the others. I was trying to create an open center in each tree.

This was more challenging on the cherry and apple trees that seemed to have the tendency for one main branch to grow straight up, compared to the peach and apricot trees, which naturally spread out. I cut the cherry, apple, and plum trees to outside lateral branches to promote tree spread.

On all the trees, I left small lateral branches to lessen sunburn, even though I had already painted the tree trunks with white non-latex paint for this purpose. I pruned my Fuyu persimmon tree very lightly, just cutting at the point of attachment (or thinning) any overlapping branches to enhance sunlight penetration. I also cut the tips (or headed) off the few long, vigorous shoots.

Since mine is a home orchard, I keep my trees shorter, so I can reach most of the fruit without a ladder. To maintain lower height, I will also have to do some pruning in early summer. I also pruned my Rainier and Bing cherry trees, and Imperial Gala apple tree lightly, but pruned my Red Fuji apple moderately, since it grew rapidly. My Santa Rosa plum, Fantasia nectarine, and Royal and Robada apricot trees needed heavy pruning. Usually, it is best to prune apricots in the summer because they are prone to Eutypa dieback.

Eutypa dieback shoot symptoms are always accompanied by a canker, which often appears V-shaped in a cross-section of the perennial wood. Similar cankers can be caused by other fungi, and canker shape alone is not diagnostic for Eutypa dieback.



Eutypa dieback cankers on the scaffold limbs of a cherry tree

The fungus enters the pruning wounds and can be spread in the winter during wet conditions. Since we have not had much rain so far, however, I decided to prune my apricot trees while I had my tools out. The plum tree had many, vigorous upright branches that needed to be thinned. With the apricot and peach trees, I often removed the flatter-angled branches and left the more upright ones. It's important to remember to clean your pruner blades with a solution of 10% bleach in order to prevent transfer of disease or fungus to another tree or healthy branch.

Keep in mind that adequate pruning peach tree lessens the amount of thinning of fruit that is needed later. With the nectarine tree, I thinned about half of the fruiting branches that originated close to the main branches. Of those that remained, I headed them by one-third if they were longer than eighteen inches. I removed or cut back most two-year old fruiting branches. When done, I circled the tree with a rope around the scaffold branches to support the nectarines I hope the tree will bear when the time comes.

The University of California has several free publications about the care of fruit trees. All of these are available online from their ANR Catalog website, located at: <http://anrcatalog.ucdavis.edu/>. At this web address, you will be able to locate a helpful free publication, titled: "Fruit Trees: Training and Pruning Deciduous Trees, #8057". The illustrations are sketches of fruit trees and are helpful in teaching which branches to cut and why. <https://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/Details.aspx?itemNo=8057> - Another great website is <http://homeorchard.ucanr.edu/>

I encourage you to try pruning. Trees are forgiving about pruning mistakes. In addition, pruning, especially of young trees, is fun. I'm happy to announce the UCCE Master Gardeners will be holding a Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop at Hurley School in Visalia. Come learn proper pruning techniques on **Saturday, Feb. 1, from 11 am - 1 pm.**

The UCCE Master Gardeners will be available to answer your gardening questions at the following venues in February:

Visalia Farmers' Market – Every Saturday morning (8-11 am), Sears parking lot, Mooney Blvd.

Feb 1, 11:00 - 1:00, Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop, Hurley School, Visalia

Feb 7-9, Visalia Home & Patio Springfest, Visalia Convention Center

Feb 11-13, World Ag Expo, Tulare

For answers to all your home gardening questions, call the Master Gardeners in Tulare County at (559) 684-3325, Tuesdays and Thursdays between 9:30 and 11:30 am; or Kings County at (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 am; or visit our website to search past articles, find links to UC gardening information, or to email us with your questions:

http://ucanr.edu/sites/UC_Master_Gardeners/

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