

January To Do List

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Many home orchards contain a variety of fruit trees that are being maintained as fruit bushes or short trees. If you are planning on planting new fruit trees this winter, talk to the nursery staff about pruning the dormant fruit tree as a short tree or fruit bush. This type of tree will be easier to maintain and produce adequate fruit for a family orchard. As the trees mature, they will be safer and easier to prune, spray and harvest. A good web site for information about "Backyard Orchard Culture" is www.davewilson.com/home-garden; click on the Backyard Home Orchard article.

Make sure to paint the trunks of all newly planted fruit trees with a solution of 50/50 white latex and water. Most fruit trees are susceptible to sunburn and borers.

Summer pruning is recommended if you want to maintain the size of your tree. However winter is a good time to prune fruit trees if you want to encourage vigorous new growth. Prune when all the leaves have fallen. First remove diseased, broken and crossing branches. Remove all suckers water sprouts. Remove 20% of last years new growth from apple, pear, cherry, and plum trees. Peaches and nectarines need about 50% of last year's growth pruned off to thin the next crop and ensure good sturdy shoot growth for future crops. A great and informative web site on pruning is <http://homeorchard.ucanr.edu>; this site has complete information about growing fruit trees in the home orchard.

Now is a good time to thin or prune large vines such as honeysuckle, trumpet creeper or passion vine. Wait until wisterias have bloomed in the spring before pruning them.

Prune repeat blooming roses by first cutting out dead or diseased canes, then cut out spindly and crossing canes. Cut back the remaining canes by one third. Clean leaves and debris from around the plants to discourage disease and over wintering insects. Spray the plant with dormant horticultural oil; if you cover the whole plant and the soil around it, this will kill insect eggs and disease spores.

For spring flowering perennials, wait until they have finished blooming before pruning them.

Because of the rains, weeds will be sprouting everywhere: they are easy to eliminate by hoeing or just by pulling them out. If this chore is done on a regular basis it is easier to keep ahead of all the weeds.