QUESTION: I have four 40- to 60-year-old pineapple guava trees that produce wonderful fruit and grow very tall. Please give me pruning information to maximize fruit production every year, make them as fire-safe as possible and be 6-8 feet tall so I can reach the fruit.

Answer: Appropriately pruning older trees is a wise investment to keep you safe and your trees consistently productive and fire resilient. Here are some guidelines for pruning your pineapple guava (Acca sellowiana):

■ Analyze the shape of your tree by removing watersprouts and suckers when they first appear, usually in April and May. Watersprouts are the branches that shoot straight up and grow quickly. Suckers are the soft branches that often grow at the base of the tree. Also remove dead, diseased or damaged branches including intersecting or touching branches.

■ If your trees are tall, estimate how much total height you want to remove and reduce the height by one-third each year over several years to the ideal height for picking. For example, if your tree is 20 feet tall, cut a little more than 4 feet each year over three years for an ideal height of 8 feet. Reducing the height over time and in consistent percentages avoids shocking the trees.

■ Reduce the height in April or May after the rainy season by using mostly thinning cuts to open the center of the tree for sunlight and air circulation. Thinning cuts remove branches down to their points of origin. Remember to paint exposed branches with a 1-to-1 solution of white latex paint and water so they don’t get sunburned.

■ In the summer, cut back side branches that have spread disproportionately to the height that complements the overall shape of the tree. Ensure no branches touch the ground. Summer is an ideal time for pruning to maintain the shape of trees.

Pruning mature pineapple guava trees follows the same principles as pruning mature fruit trees like apples and pears. Once you have pruned trees to the right size, keep them pruned to that size.

Question: I received a beautiful potted orchid as a gift, but I don’t have a green thumb. What do I need to do to keep it alive?

Answer: First, determine what kind of orchid you have. The majority of the least-expensive ones and more widely available orchids are either Phalaenopsis or Oncidium orchids. They are propagated in this country but originate in the humid tropical forests of South America, Mexico and Asia.

These orchids grow best inside the house. Look closely at the soil your orchid came in. It should be a mix of bark and a little soil. Oncidium tolerates more chunky bark; Phalaenopsis prefers finely shredded.

If your orchid came planted in mostly soil or in large pieces of chunky bark, repot it as soon as possible. You can purchase a bag of orchid mix from your garden center. The contents of the bag should be a mix of shredded bark and soil and be slightly damp when you open the bag. If your orchid came in a pot that has holes in the bottom and on the sides, you should reuse the pot.

To repot the orchid, remove the orchid from the pot and refill the pot with fresh, moist — not soggy — orchid mix. Plant the orchid in the top 2 inches of soil, soak the pot with the orchid in water for 15 minutes, then let it drain.

Place your orchid in a window where it can get indirect light — never in the hot sun. How often you water it depends on the humidity inside your house. Poke your finger into the orchid pot to monitor the soil; it should be damp, never soggy and never dry.

Feed orchids maybe once a month with diluted, weak liquid fertilizer, but be cautious because you can kill the roots with too much fertilizer.

And watch out. Once you successfully grow orchids, you’ll want more!

Contributors to this week’s column were Ann Chambers, Pat Decker and Karen Felker. Send your gardening questions to scmgpd@gmail.com. The UC Master Gardener Program of Sonoma County (sonomamg.ucanr.edu) provides environmentally sustainable, science-based horticultural information to Sonoma County home gardeners. The Master Gardeners will answer in the newspaper only questions selected for this column. Other questions may be directed to their Information Desk: 707565-2608 or mgsonoma@ucanr.edu