

Winter Fruit Pruning Workshop 19th February 2022

Key points – courtesy of Richard Read

Apple and Pear

- Rootstock dictates the size of a tree and for allotments dwarf stock fruit trees makes managing tree size and harvesting fruit more efficient and productive.
- Most apple trees are lateral spur bearing, with some old varieties such as Bramley tip spur bearing, fruit growing only at the end of the branch. Prune to a fruit bud (larger than a leaf bud), using sharp, effective secateurs, aiming to open up the tree.
- Prune apple, pear and soft fruit between November and early March. Trim off some spurs on lateral growth and prune back to a fruit bud, where branches are growing up. Fruit buds are fatter than leaf buds.
- Feed fruit trees according to size with a potassium and nitrogen rich feed such as Q4 or blood, fish and bone; feeding in spring and then again in early summer.
- Mulch to a diameter of at least 1/2 – 1metre or use pads to cover around.
- Take off grass growing around the tree by slicing and turning turf over as grass takes out nitrogen.
- Fruit bearing branches can be bent down, tied loosely to encourage the tree to produce more fruit.
- Established espaliered trees benefit from being pruned over two years, training the fruit bearing branches along the espalier frame.
- Don't leave stumps as they are open to disease; cut flush back to the adjacent branch. Apply an anti bacterial product to cuts of more than 2cm diameter
- To tackle codling moth (the grub inside your apple), apply a thick band of grease around the tree trunk to prevent the moth larva from climbing up the tree to lay eggs in the emerging fruit bud. Pheromone traps will indicate the presence of the male moth.

Soft fruit

- Aim to open up the middle of soft fruit bushes, to create an open bowl effect.
- Take off non-fruiting shoots to maintain shape, cutting back to a fruit bud (fatter than leaf buds)
- Blackcurrant crops on new shoots cut out oldest, darkest shoots by a third
- Red and white currants trim over-long main side shoots; remove older shoots if plants are woody and congested.
- Keep bushes to a manageable height, cutting back to a fruit bud.
- A microscopic mite living inside dormant buds causes blackcurrant 'big bud'. Affected buds become abnormally swollen and rounded; the mite can also spread reversion disease. Dispose of heavily affected plants after the fruit has been picked and replant in autumn with clean new stock. The affected buds of lightly infested plants can be picked off during the winter and disposed of away from blackcurrant plants. One mite-resistant cultivar, '*Ben Hope*', is available.
- Suggested raspberry varieties: mid- season – '*Glen Ample*'; late season – '*Tulameen*'; Autumn fruiting – '*Joan J*'; Best Taste – '*Glen Magna*'
- After 5 years or so it's a good idea to replace soft fruit bushes, as they become less productive.

Plum

- Prune in early summer to avoid silver leaf disease or other infections.
- Young branches can be bent over early in the season to promote growth and productivity.

General advice

- Profit from the hard work horticulturalists are doing to develop products that are disease resistant and acknowledge global warming impacts.
- Select a suitable rootstock size for allotments eg 106 or 27 for apples/pears, 'Pixie' for plums
- Always clean your fruit prune saw after use to avoid spreading disease and infection.
- Ensure openness at the centre of fruit trees/bushes so they get plenty of air.
- Don't worry too much about your pruning techniques!