

Fruit Tree Pruning - General

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Ever since I was probably 12 years old, once the calendar hits mid February, I just immediately start thinking about pruning fruit trees. From now until the trees start blooming is a good time to prune fruit trees, just avoid doing it when the wood is frozen. All fruit trees need annual pruning. Cherry, pear and plum don't need much pruning beyond just general maintenance, that I'll describe shortly. Peaches, including nectarines, and apples need specific annual pruning that I'll discuss over the next couple of days. In all trees you want to remove broken, damaged or diseased branches. You want to remove, early on, branches with narrow angles of attachment as these are weak and prone to breaking out. You want to take out sucker sprouts, which are branches that grow rapidly and tend to go straight up from the trunk or major branches. You want to remove a branch that is rubbing against another branch. Obviously cut back branches that are so close to the ground that they make it difficult to harvest or mow around the tree. You often want to cut back branches so you don't have fruit growing on long weak branches. You want to thin out interior branches to facilitate light penetration and making it easier to spray. It is also important to start pruning a new fruit tree the year after you plant it to start helping it form a good sound structure. Waiting several years before doing anything usually results in a tangled and confusing mess! This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Pruning Apple Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Apple trees, perhaps more than any other fruit tree, require extensive annual pruning. All of the general items we talked about yesterday apply to apples. We need to be careful when planting a dwarf or semi-dwarf tree so that the graft is well above ground level. If the graft touches the soil it will commonly root from above the graft and these new roots will nullify the dwarfing effect of the root stock. Even with a properly planted dwarf tree, apples tend to get very overgrown, thick and tangled. Most modern apple varieties fruit on short branches called spurs. Take the time to look closely at a blooming apple tree and you can quickly learn to discern what these spurs look like. Start young training the tree to have 3 or 4 major lateral branches coming off the tree at different locations around the tree. Then develop strong branches with short secondary branches that will produce the spurs that bear the fruit. Spurs generally don't start to bloom until they are 2 to 3 years old but can stay fruitful for the life of the tree after that. An apple tree will try to produce as many apples as possible. But the more apples it produces the smaller they are. If too many apples are on a tree one year, the tree will not bloom very much the next year. But with pruning, and thinning if necessary, you have fewer but larger fruit and you increase the likelihood that the tree will bloom adequately the following year. As a rule of thumb, you don't want more than one apple per six inches of branch length. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Pruning Peach Trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Unlike apple trees that bloom on 3 year or older wood, peach trees, and nectarines, will only bloom on one year old wood. Therefore, much of the goal in pruning a peach tree is to encourage it to grow new wood this year, so it will bloom next year, that is, if the blossoms don't get frozen! One of the challenges is that if left unpruned, a peach tree will put on new growth and it will bloom, but much of that new growth is going to be at the ends of the existing branches. So the branches get longer and longer and the blossoms become further and further away from the main support structure of the tree and you wind up with big, long, weak branches that have fruit on the ends that bends the branches down and often break them. So, your goal is to keep branches short and the tree compact and the new wood growth should be coming directly off the larger, stronger scaffold branches that can support the weight. You really want to prune a peach tree heaviest in the top of the tree and the ends of the scaffolds essentially directing new growth to occur around that mature tree structure. Small branches on the interior of the tree should also be removed. The Riley and Geary County Extension Offices are co-hosting a fruit tree pruning clinic this Saturday, the 24th, starting at 10:30 a.m. at 6611 Lyon Creek Road south of Junction City, just a little ways west of US 77 on Lyon Creek Rd. Demonstrations of proper pruning of fruit trees will be presented. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Peach Leaf Curl treatments

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I guess we'll just stay with the fruit tree care theme that we seem to be on this week and talk about peach leaf curl control. Peaches don't have a lot of insect or disease issues but the one we seem to see every year is peach leaf curl. The problem is that peach leaf curl shows up after blooming and after the leaves are fully developed. Everything looks fine and all of a sudden the leaves start to distort, twist and curl, often turning yellow and red. The big problem is that the leaves are infected early in the year just as the buds break open even though the symptoms don't show up until weeks later. Once you see the symptoms there's nothing you can do. Fortunately the disease doesn't kill the tree, but if you have a peach crop on, you can lose some of the fruit and the fruit that is left is often smaller. To protect the leaves you need to treat it now, before the buds start to swell and break open. There is one fungicide labeled to control peach leaf curl but it's available in several formulations. The fungicide is chlorothalonil and it is found in most broad spectrum garden fungicides from Ortho, Bonide and Fertilome. You need to mix this up according to label directions and then thoroughly spray all of the tree. I know it seems weird to be spraying a tree that doesn't have leaves but you need to thoroughly cover the tree. Spray from multiple sides for thorough coverage. If the tree is small enough, a hose end sprayer is the better option as you can apply a lot more water to get it covered. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Pruning neglected fruit trees

This is Gardening with Chuck on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. To finish out our fruity week let's talk about pruning overgrown or neglected fruit trees which usually means apple trees. Sometimes you just have to make a decision on whether to maintain an apple tree as basically an ornamental, or just make one cut at ground level and start over. If you are serious about getting a badly overgrown apple tree back into shape be advised that it will take 3 to 5 years to accomplish this. You never want to try to prune a tree back to the way it should be in one year. The shock to the tree will generate a plethora of sucker growth for several years to come. You never want to prune out more than 30% of the tree in one year. What you need to do is start by cutting out all the dead wood. This doesn't count towards that 30% removal. Remove all suckers from the base of the tree. These are those fast growing shoots that usually grow straight up. Try to keep all the items you prune out in a pile to the side of the tree so you can sort of see where you are with removal. Next choose about six of the best branches to keep as scaffold branches. Remove all others. Make these cuts flush to the branch collar, that natural swelling where one branch joins another. Don't cut into the branch collar however. Do not paint pruning cuts. That actually slows down the healing process. Then thin branches on each scaffold branch and shorten up the scaffolds. By now you've probably reached your 30% limit and need to stop pruning for this year. This has been Gardening with Chuck on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.