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How to Prune Plum Trees

By Paul Curran

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In this article you will find out how to prune plum trees. One of several articles on how to prune fruit trees. Pruning plum trees is straightforward, once the trees are established, and consists mainly of thinning out overcrowded wood. Some rather more detailed pruning is, however, necessary in the early years, in order to build up a suitable framework.

How to prune plum trees – Maiden tree

If a maiden tree is planted, that is, a tree within one year of budding or grafting, pruning may be carried out in the Spring, after deciding on tree form. Generally plums will be grown as half-standards having a main stem about 4 ft. in length, before the branch system.

An open centre is aimed at, the main branch system forming the outside, with young wood filling in the interior. This method of forming the half standard tree can also be used for Apples and Pears.

Assuming a maiden tree has been purchased, this would be planted in the Autumn and, later on, when the tree has settled down, and you are wondering how to prune plum trees, it should be pruned to a bud, 9 to 12 inches above the height of the lowest branch desired.

In the following season shoots will grow from buds below the top, and the most suitable are left, ensuring that they are well spaced and at a wide angle to the stem. Other shoots are removed,

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leaving about 5 or so which will form the main branch system.

The top bud will grow strongly; this can be offset by making a nick below it with a knife, forcing more growth into the lower buds. Wide angled branches can be encouraged by making small notches in the bark above selected buds; the topmost shoot can be removed later. Any growth arising below the position of the lowest branch should merely be shortened for the first year or two before removing, as they assist in thickening the stem.

The selected branches are subsequently pruned to a suitable outward pointing bud, during the first year or two, one third to

one half of the new wood being removed; afterwards this is reduced to mere tipping which is discontinued altogether eventually. The tree will consist of 6 to 7 well-spaced main branches, growing from them and lateral growths which will form the bulk of the fruiting wood.

How to prune plum trees – 2 or 3-year-old

If the tree has been purchased as a 2 or 3-year-old, it is advisable to defer pruning for one year after planting. The branch system of such a tree will already have been formed. After the framework of the tree has been formed, subsequent pruning will consist of cutting out dead and diseased wood, badly placed wood crossing, or too upright growth, and ensuring that the growth remaining is well spaced.

How to prune plum trees – Drooping varieties

Certain varieties have a drooping habit. Although during the early years this factor need not influence pruning unduly, as the tree becomes established the drooping tendency will be more pronounced.

It will be necessary to prune branch leaders to an upward-pointing bud, and not to an outward one, as in upright growing varieties. Similarly, lower branches will hang down, and may have to be shortened eventually to a more suitable subsidiary branch.

How to prune plum trees – Silver Leaf Disease

This serious disease of Plums enters the tissues through open wounds and cuts. It is able to do so during the winter and most readily infects wood through large cuts which expose the heart.

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During the formation period of the tree, pruning can be carried out in the early Spring, as cuts are relatively small.

On established trees, however, it is better to defer pruning until late Spring or Summer, and to perform this operation during dry weather, especially where large wounds are made.

The natural gums exuded at this time assist healing. Broken branches should be sawn off neatly, and all large wounds protected with white lead paint. Always use a sharp, curved blade knife, or a good pair of secateurs, for pruning. Avoid "jagged" cuts, which can lead to damage, and do not cut too closely to the topmost bud.

Paul Curran is CEO of Cuzcom Internet Publishing Group and webmaster at Trees-and-Bushes.com, providing access to their nursery supplier for a range of quality plants, trees, bushes, shrubs, seeds

and garden products.

How to Prune Pear Trees

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In this article you will find out how to prune pear trees. Pruning pear trees can be done several ways.

The pruning of pear trees, in the early stages, follows the same pattern as that for apples. Basically, the treatment of established bushes, in a garden, is also the same for pears and apples. There are, however, a few points to which attention should be drawn.

How to prune pear trees – General

Pears, generally, will stand harder pruning than apples without being forced into excessive wood growth. Bush trees should be encouraged to form a sturdy framework of branches by moderately hard pruning during the early years. Three or 4 suitably placed branches are pruned to produce 6 or 8 further branches from 2 well-positioned buds, this process can be repeated in the following year. Once the basic framework of the tree has been established, pruning should be lighter until the tree begins to

bear.

As pears generally tend to spur up more freely than apples, once the trees have started cropping it will be necessary to thin out the spur systems frequently, to encourage new wood growth.

How to prune pear trees – Older trees

On older trees which have been spur–pruned rather too thoroughly, it will be of benefit to reduce drastically the amount of fruiting wood, and cutting back branches to produce new growth is advisable. Renewal pruning, as for apples, is practiced, bearing in mind that more wood may be removed, without producing excessive new growth.

How to prune pear trees – Varieties

Varietal Habit is a factor to consider, for certain pears have a much more erect habit of growth than apples. This is particularly noticeable in Doyenne du Cornice, Fertility and Conference, when hard pruned. When pruning branch leaders to a bud for extension growth, it is better to prune to a bud above the outward–pointing

one required. This outward–pointing bud will then grow out at a wider angle, the unwanted portion being removed later.

Other varieties, such as Catillac and Beurre d'Amanlis, also Conference when lightly pruned, have a spreading tendency, and it may be better to prune to an upward bud, or even to a bud above the upward one required, removing the unwanted portion later, as before.

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