



Pruning apples and pears

There's a lot of information out there on pruning apples and pears which can be a bit on the confusing side. This guide aims to simplify things a bit by discussing different types of pruning and when to do which type of pruning on different trees.

There are three main types of pruning regimes for apples and pears, namely formative pruning, maintenance pruning and the Modified Lorette system (not as scary as it sounds)

Formative pruning

This is the pruning that happens on very young trees during the first three years of a tree's life to encourage it to grow into the required shape. Most trees sold will be at least two to three years old and need little if any formative pruning.

Maintenance pruning

This is carried out to encourage fruit bearing spurs, and maintain a healthy plant, and is carried out in winter, although try to avoid periods of particularly heavy frost.

General rules apply such as cutting out any damaged, diseased or dead wood, also try to cut out any branches which are crossing or will soon cross, as rubbing branches damage the bark and allow diseases or pests to attack the tree.

If the tree is crowded you should also try to remove branches that grow inwards, or those that join the stem at a shallow angle, as these will be weaker and more likely to break as the branch is weighed down by fruit, especially on younger trees. Ideal branches should join the tree at 90 degrees or thereabouts.

The pruning technique for encouraging fruit bearing spurs differs slightly depending on whether the apple is a spur bearing variety or a tip bearing variety.

Spur bearers and Tip bearers

Apples and pears grow from large buds on side shoots growing along the branch. If fruit is born only at the tips of these side shoots it is a tip bearer, if they are present all along, it is a spur bearer.

Spur bearing varieties

Prune back the growth from last summer by one to two thirds. Shorten lateral shoots back to about 4-6 buds. As the tree gets older you may need to thin out overcrowded laterals.

Tip and partial tip bearing varieties

More limited pruning is required. Shorten laterals with more than 6 buds back to a single bud and leave the remainder.

Modified Lorette System

This is carried out only on heavily trained forms such as espaliers, fans and cordons and is carried out in the summer to reduce overcrowding, allowing air and light to circulate, and to further train the tree to the desired form.

Pruning is carried out when the current years' growth starts to turn woody in late summer. Prune new laterals longer than 20cm to the third leaf to encourage a spur system to form.

Over vigorous laterals are removed completely. Side shoots on mature laterals should be cut back to one bud.

The tips of the leaders can also be tied into the framework to maintain the shape at this point.

Spur bearing varieties

Apples

Cox's Orange Pippin
Sunset
James Grieve
Greensleeves
Egremont Russet
Spartan

Pears

Beth
Williams' Bon Chretien
Beurre Hardy
Concorde
Conference
Doyenne du Comice
Catillac

Tip and partial tip bearing varieties

Apples

Blenheim Orange
Bramley's Seedling
Tydeman's Early Worcester
Pink Lady
Worcester Pearmain
Granny Smith
Discovery
Queen Cox

Pears

Josephine de Maline