

Pruning Fruit Trees



Created by the Grand Junction District
For more information contact us
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Caution



- The following pruning information and instructions are designed for small to medium sized pruning jobs
- If the work is off the ground, if a chainsaw is needed, or for tree removal: the work should be done by a ISA Certified Arborist *with insurance*
 - International Society of Arboriculture,
www.isa-arbor.com

Pruning Fruit Trees

Fruit Production

Success is dependent upon cumulative effects of:

- Cultivar and rootstock
- Water and Soil management
- Pest management
- Pruning and training
- Site characteristics – soil pH level
- Weather

Fruit Tree Pruning Objectives

Growing Fruit not Leaves

- Structure objective
 - Young Trees – develop tree form to support maximum crop load
 - Older Trees – maintain structure and provide good light harvest for fruit production
- Pruning should be done as close to bud break as possible
 - Reduces winter injury
 - Cuts close more quickly, less chance of disease
 - Reduces likelihood of the buds below the pruning point drying out during the winter
- Is an annual process

Fruit Tree Pruning Objectives

- Remove all diseased, dead, or damaged branches = **3Ds**
- Remove crossing branches, suckers, and watersprouts
- Prune to outside buds and branches
- Maximize sunlight to branches
- Thin the current fruit crop when appropriate (timing)
- No fruit should touch
- Establish harvest height
- Maximize fruit production area
- Create future branching

Tree Structure

- Type of fruit tree determines pruning objectives and management
- Drupe aka Stone fruit
 - Almonds and Peaches grow on 1 year old wood
 - Apricots and Cherries grow on long-lived fruit spurs
 - Plums grow on both 1 yr old wood and fruit spurs
- Pome
 - Apples and Pears mostly grow on long-lived fruit spurs
 - Some apples and pears grow on the tips of branches
 - Need to know your varieties characteristics

Tree Structure

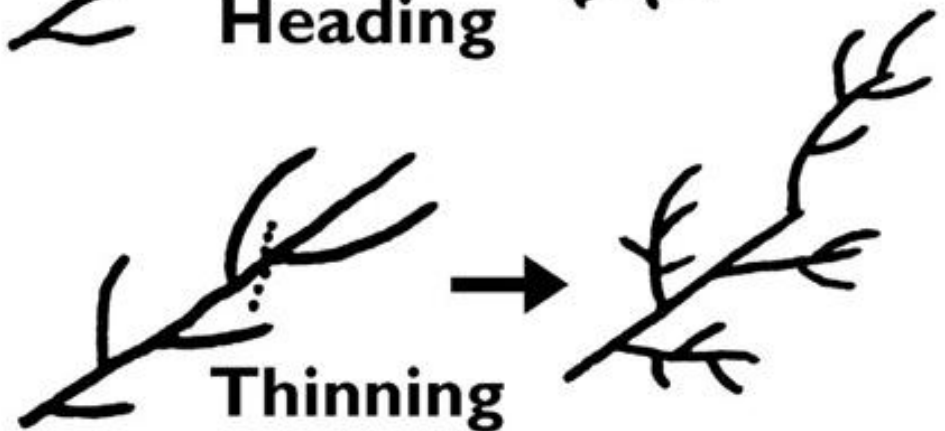
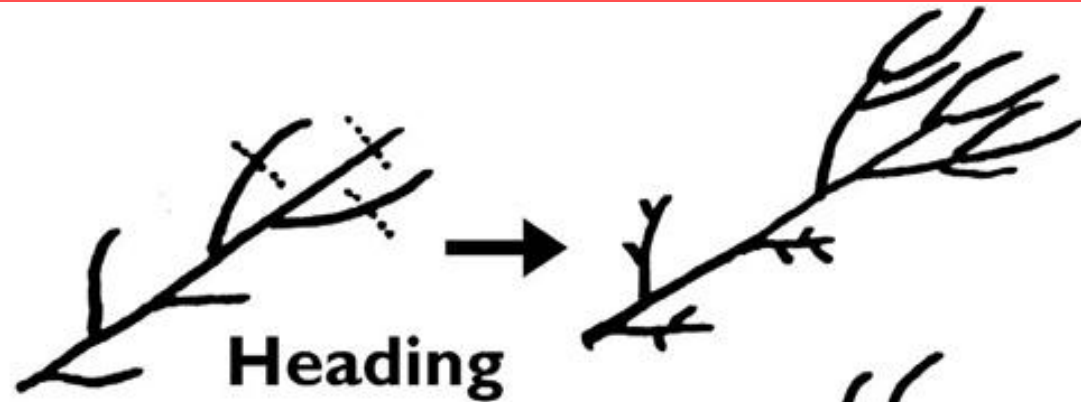
Principles and Considerations

- Light + Water = Fruit
 - Pruning and Training
 - Harvest light for flower bud initiation and fruit color development
 - Overall tree structure must be developed to hold the crop load desired
 - Unpruned trees tend to produce weak, short growth and small fruit
 - Pruning height – keep the tree within reach for easier management (pruning, spraying, picking)

Types of Fruit Tree Pruning

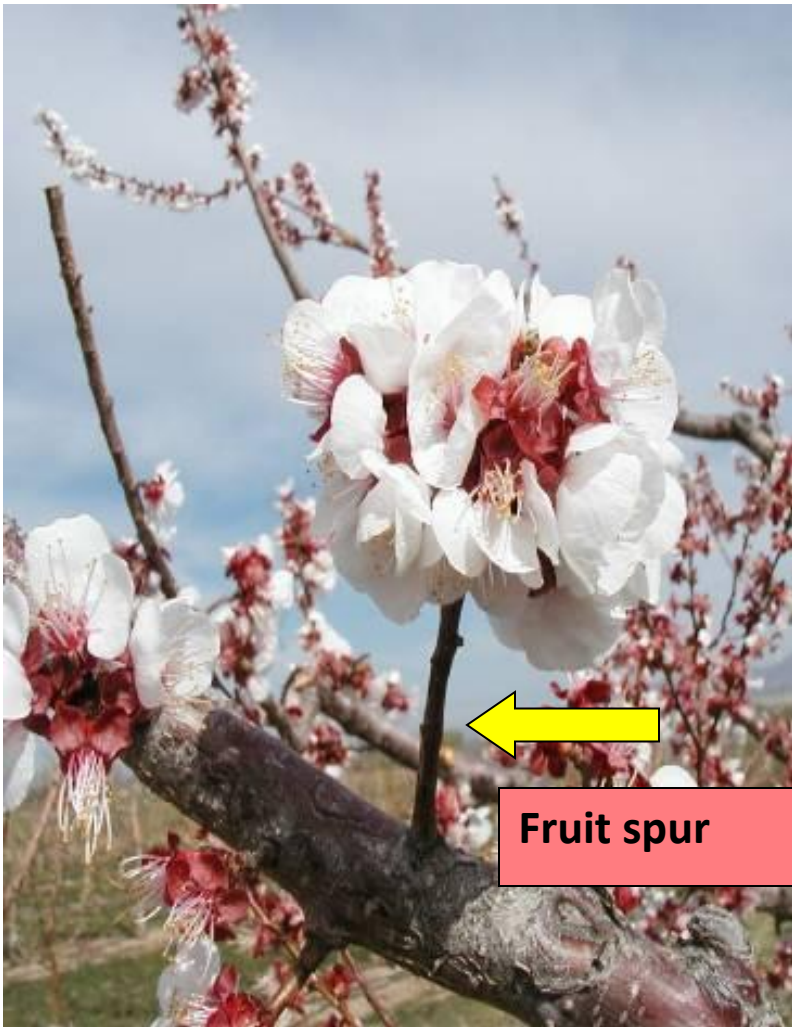
- **Heading back** is the removal of the terminal portion of a shoot or branch, usually it is one year wood.

- Results in dense, clustered growth at the cut end.



- **Thinning out** removes shoots or branches at their base. In general, this is the preferred method of pruning. Creates stronger branch attachments.

Apricot



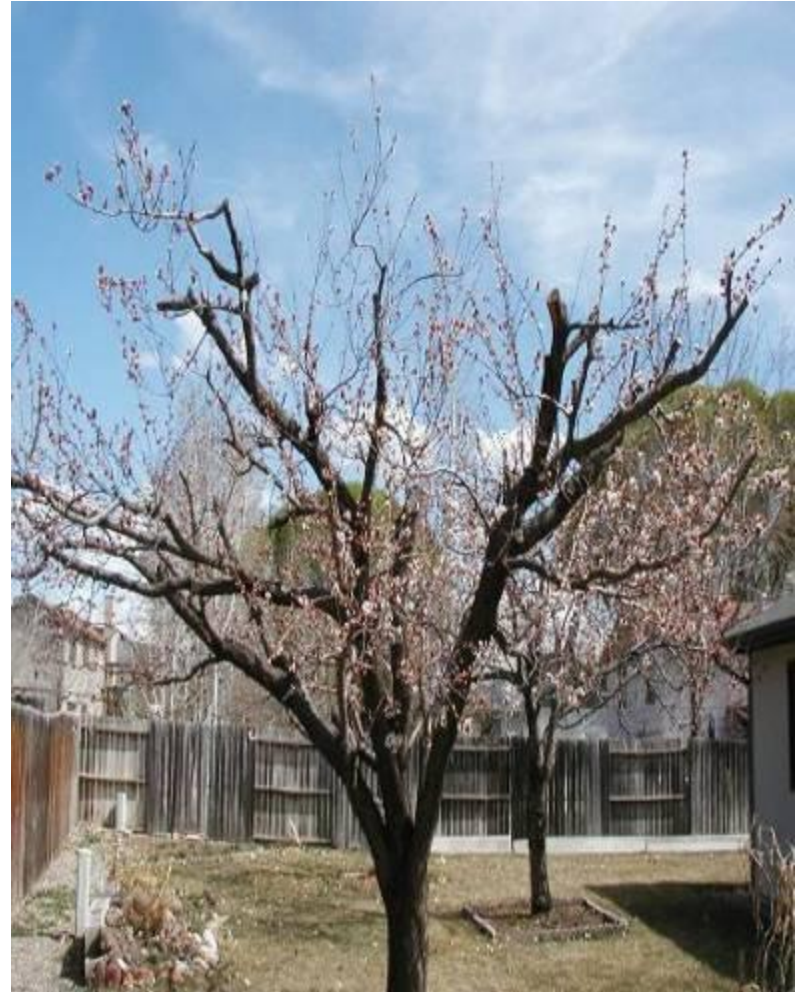
Fruit blossoms fill the tree so prune heavily to thin fruit

Apricot



Wait until last frost of season to prune – End of March

Apricot



Apricot pruned poorly with lots of stubs

Sweet Cherry



Open Center

Sweet Cherry



Cherries produced on spurs from at least 2 year old wood

Sweet Cherry



Old spurs are less vigorous - prune to encourage younger ones

Peach



Open center peach tree annually pruned to create 1 year old wood. Typically remove 70% of the branches followed by thinning of 90% of the young fruit with 6-8 in. spacing

Peach



Decadent backyard peach with very little 1 year wood. Over pruned to encourage new shoots and accommodate the ladder.

Peach



Image source: Norm Wingard

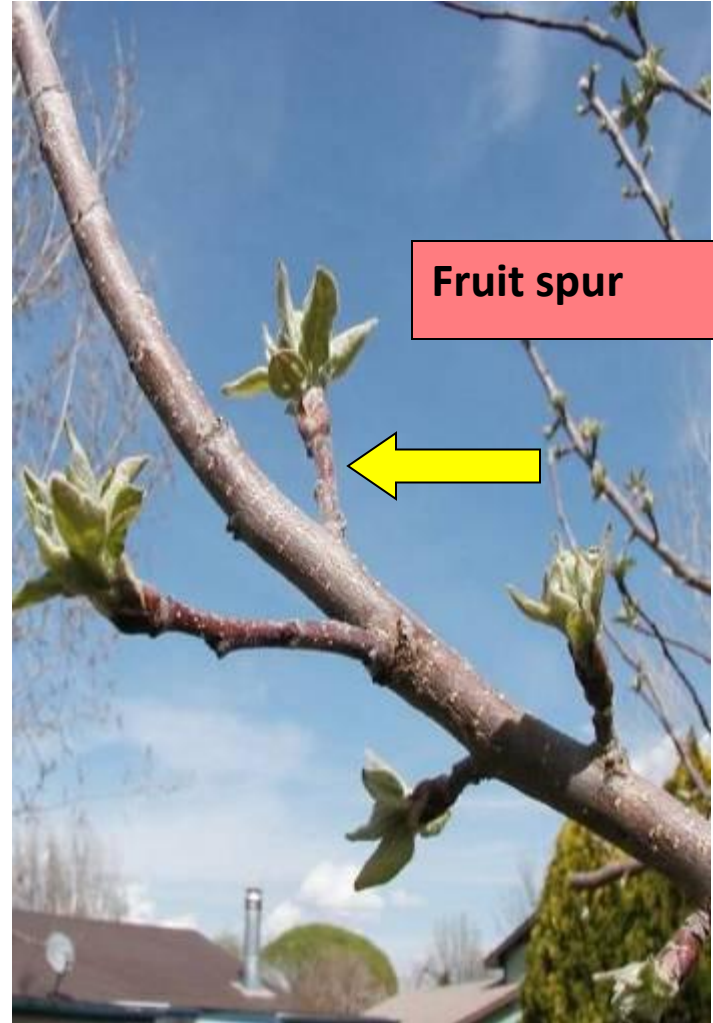
Cytospora fungus canker on peach. Prune in January or February to reduce the risk of infection. *Cytospora* will eventually kill the entire tree.

Apple



- Open center Gala apple
- Goal is to maximize sunlight to all parts of the tree
- Tree is annually pruned to maintain paths for sunlight to the fruit
- Fruit spacing: 6–8 inches apart

Apple



Typically remove 70 to 75 percent of the branches every year

Apple



Central leader apple open to accommodate sunlight

Favorite Websites

Special Thanks to Vince Urbina for his pictures and information.

- **Dr. Ed Gillman**
 - <http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/>
- **OSU Landscape Plants**
 - <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/>
- **Tree Browser from Utah State University – Extension Forestry**
 - <http://treebrowser.org>
- **Colorado State Extention**
 - www.ext.colostate.edu/
- **Colorado Tree Coalition**
 - www.coloradotrees.org