

Column Name- The Heartland Minute

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Pruning Fruit Trees

Having a fruit tree on your property can be such a fun treat. There is nothing quite as enjoyable as picking a ripe apple from your apple tree on a hot summer day. While fruit trees are a joy to have, they do require some maintenance to continue their longevity.

Now through March is a great time to prune your fruit trees, as long as the wood isn't frozen. The following are some general recommendations on pruning mature fruit trees followed by more specific instructions on each species. If you have young fruit trees, there are more specific instructions that differ from more mature trees.

General Recommendations:

- Take out broken, damaged or diseased branches.
- If two branches form a narrow angle, prune one out. Narrow angles are weak angles and tend to break during wind or ice storms.
- Take out all suckers. Suckers are branches that grow straight up. They may originate from the trunk or from major branches.
- If two branches cross and rub against one another, one should be taken out.
- Cut back or remove branches that are so low they interfere with harvest or pruning. If cutting back a branch, always cut back to another branch or a bud. Do not leave a stub.
- Cut back branches to reduce the total size of the tree, if necessary.
- Thin branches on the interior of the tree.
- Follow the steps above in order but stop if you reach 30% of the tree.

Specific Instructions:

Peach and Nectarine: Peach and nectarine require more pruning than any other fruit trees because they bear fruit on growth from the previous year. Not pruning results in fruit being borne further and further from the center of the tree allowing a heavy fruit crop to break major branches due to the weight of the fruit. Prune long branches back to a shorter side branch.

Apple: Apples tend to become overgrown if not pruned regularly. Wind storms and ice storms are then more likely to cause damage. Also, trees that are not pruned often become biennial bearers. In other words, they bear a huge crop one year and none the next. Biennial bearing is caused by too many fruit on the tree. Though pruning helps, fruit often needs to be thinned as well. The goal is an apple about every 6 inches. Spacing can vary as long as the average is about every 6 inches.

Cherry, Pear, Plum: Light pruning is usually all that is needed. Simply remove branches that are causing or will cause a problem according to the general recommendations above.

If you would like more details on all aspects of fruit tree pruning, come to the extension office for specific publications and guidance.

For more information regarding Agriculture and Natural Resources, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension call the office at 620-583-7455, email me, Lindsay Shorter, at lindsayshorter@ksu.edu, or stop by the office which is located inside the courthouse. Be sure to follow K-State Research and Extension- Greenwood County on Facebook for the most up-to-date information on Extension education programs and the Greenwood County 4-H program.