

Green Garden News

Pruning Fruit Trees

February is the best time to prune most fruit trees. The coldest part of winter is almost over, and trees will soon be growing and can heal pruning injuries.

Pruning fruit trees can be beneficial in several ways. It improves tree health by removing dead, injured or diseased limbs. It eases harvesting by shaping and reducing tree height. It increases flower production on trees such as peaches that bloom on new growth. It improves fruit quality by allowing more light penetration, which improves fruit color, and by thinning the fruit crop, which improves fruit size and sugar content.

The basic tools for pruning are lopping shears, hand pruners and pruning saws. Lopping shears can cut wood from ¼ inch up to 1 ½ inches in diameter. The long handles enable limbs to be pruned up to 8 feet away. They also allow extra leverage when cutting larger limbs. Often, no other equipment is needed. A pruning saw is needed, however, for limbs too large for lopping shears.

Hand pruners are very useful on small plants or when a lot of small limbs less than ½ inch in diameter need to be cut. The short handles give more control when doing detail pruning.

The first step in pruning is to remove any dead, broken or diseased branches. Branches should be cut back to a fork or bud. Generally, a ridge or area of wrin-

kled wood is around the base of the branch. This is called the branch collar.

The collar has the ability to compartmentalize nearby wounds and should not be cut. The limb should be cut just outside the collar. The branch collar will then quickly grow over the cut surface. Do not leave a stub sticking out of the collar. The collar will not be able to grow over the cut surface, and the stub will frequently die. This will sometimes lead to a hollow in the tree.

Next, remove branches that grow toward the center of the tree. These branches will often cross other limbs and cause rubbing injury. These limbs also will prevent light penetration and air circulation, which reduces fruit coloring and encourages diseases. Limbs of equal size that form a sharp “V” will tend to split apart. One of the limbs should be removed before the limbs get very large.

Limb growth can be directed by pruning back to a bud or shoot that is pointing toward the direction where growth is desired. This procedure allows the tree to be shaped or to fill in gaps in tree structure.

Different methods of pruning are used on different fruit species. Fruit trees such as peach, nectarine and plums produce fruit on 1-year-old

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February Gardening Tips

Flowers

- Re-fertilize cool season flowerbeds, using a liquid or granular form of fertilizer. Be careful not to apply excessive amounts and keep granules away from the base of stems.
- Prepare flowerbeds for spring planting by adding and incorporating soil amendments like mushroom compost, manure or homemade compost. Till or spade the bed to incorporate the amendments with the existing soil to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Allow the prepared bed to lie undisturbed for 3 to 4 weeks before planting. This provides time for some important biological activity to take place, and new plants are less likely to suffer from stem and root rots as a result.
- Replenish mulch in flowerbeds.
- Prune rose bushes.

Trees and Shrubs

- February is possible the best month for rejuvenation of old, overgrown shrubs. When pruned now, plants have an entire growing season to recover.
- Prune summer flowering deciduous shrubs such as Althea and Hibiscus. Since they flower on current season's growth, flowering can actually be enhanced by proper pruning
- Do NOT prune the spring flowering shrubs yet. Azaleas, Spiraeas and Forsythia flower during early spring because buds were formed last summer and fall. Pruning in February would therefore remove most of the flower buds.
- Cold damaged trees and shrubs should NOT be pruned until new growth appears. You want to preserve as much healthy plant material as possible.
- Replenish mulch in shrub beds
- Finish planting ornamental and fruit trees.

Fruits and Nuts

- Fertilize *established* pecan trees. Use a "special pecan fertilizer" that contains zinc. Use 2 lbs. for every year of age of the tree up to a maximum of 55 lbs. Broadcast the fertilizer evenly beneath the tree.
- Fertilize *established* peach, plum, pear, persimmon, apple and fig. Apply about 1 ½ lbs of a 10-10-10 (or similar) fertilizer for each year of age of the tree until a maximum of 10 to 15 lbs. per tree is reached.

- Blueberries are very sensitive to nitrogen and can be killed easily, particularly when they are young. Fertilize only if your goal is to increase yield or berry size. An annual application of 2 ounces of a special "azalea/camellia" or "special blueberry" type fertilizer per plant in February is ample fertilizer on 2-year-old plants.
- Prune muscadine grapes between mid-February to mid-March. A standard method is to allow 2 to 4 node spurs spaced every 6 inches of cordon. You may notice that pruning cuts bleed, but there is no evidence that this is injurious to the vine.
- Grapes (bunch and muscadine) should be fertilized at the rate of 1 ½ lbs of 10-10-10 for each year of age with a maximum of 5 lbs per plant applied in late February.
- Last call for planting fruit trees! Most fruit trees such as pecans, plums, persimmons, figs, peaches and nectarines are shipped bare root and should be planted during the dormant season.
- Apply a spray containing horticultural oil emulsion to dormant fruit trees and ornamental shrubs. Follow label directions carefully.

Vegetable Garden

- Several winter vegetables can still be successfully grown by starting them this month. Plant beets, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, Chinese cabbage, collards, endive/escarole, kale, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, parsley, English peas, radish and turnips.
- Plant Irish potatoes. Purchase certified seed potatoes rather than using the grocery store kinds. Use 2-ounce seed pieces with eyes and plant them 3 to 4 inches deep.
- Prepare spring vegetable and herb beds for planting by adding and incorporating soil amendments like mushroom compost, manure or homemade compost. Wait 3 to 4 weeks before planting.

Lawns

- Hold off on fertilizing the lawn. It is still **too early** for an application of nitrogen containing product. Cold temperatures and lack of plant response would likely result in wasted fertilizer. However, your winter weeds would benefit greatly.

Plant Roses Now for Summer Blooms

Now is an excellent time to consider adding roses to your landscape, so you can enjoy the beautiful blooms this summer.

For many gardeners, particularly those just getting into roses, a rose is a rose. But there several different categories or types of roses available and within each type are numerous cultivars. Before you go to the nursery, it's important to think about the type of roses you want to grow so that you make the proper selections.

Decide how you want to use roses in the landscape and why you intend to grow them. The trend these days is to incorporate roses into landscape plantings just like any other shrub. This works particularly well with the old garden roses, shrub roses, landscape roses and floribundas.

The following is not a complete list of all the many types of roses, but it includes some of the more-popular categories that will do well in our area.

Keep in mind that repeat-flowering (everblooming) roses bloom intermittently from around late April to early December. Once-blooming roses bloom profusely around May and produce few or no flowers afterward.

We'll start with the modern roses – the types developed after 1867, the year the first hybrid tea was introduced.

Hybrid Tea Roses – Large, exquisitely shaped flowers, generally produced singly on long stems, and an amazing range of colors are the hallmarks of hybrid tea roses. The plants range in size up to more than 6 feet and can be leggy and awkward in appearance. Highly susceptible to black spot, these roses generally require regular spraying and pruning to remain healthy and vigorous. They are repeat-flowering roses.

Grandiflora Roses – These are tall plants that produce hybrid tea-like flowers singly or in clusters of a few flowers on long stems. Generally comparable to hybrid teas, they also require similar care. Repeat flowering.

Floribunda Roses – A useful type of rose for landscape planting, the shrubby growth is less un-gainly than hybrid teas. The flowers are smaller than hybrid teas and are often brightly colored and produced in clusters. Fragrance is light or lacking entirely. Repeat flowering.

Climbing Roses and Ramblers – These roses produce long canes that can be tied or trained on a support. Some roses have been bred to climb, while others are vigorous mutations of bush roses. Ramblers and many climbers are once blooming, but some climbers are repeat flowering, so check before purchasing.

Shrub/Landscape Roses – This really is a catchall name for roses that tend to be bushy and are useful for landscape planting. This category includes English roses, ground cover roses, landscape roses, shrub roses, hedge roses and others. Currently, the Knock Out rose and its several color forms are a very popular part of this category. Repeat flowering.

Now, we'll move to the old garden roses – the types developed before 1867. The term "old garden rose" is a catchall term used for many distinctly different categories. The following are just a few of the many categories.

China Roses – *Rosa chinensis* was the first repeat-blooming rose discovered, and the China roses are derived from this species. (All repeat-flowering roses likely have *R. chinensis* in their breeding.) The abundant flowers are not highly scented and have thin, delicate petals. The foliage is neat, dark green, pointed and rarely bothered by black spot. These roses have a bushy, twiggy growth habit that fits in well with landscape planting. Repeat flowering.

Tea Roses – Teas produce relatively large flowers in pastel shades and light reds. The fragrant flowers are produced continuously on robust bushes that are rugged and disease resistant. Repeat flowering.

Noisette Roses – Mostly climbers, although a few are robust shrubs, these roses thrive in the Deep South. The pastel-colored flowers are fragrant and produced in clusters that hang down from the canes. Repeat flowering.

Bourbon Roses – Though more susceptible to black spot than the previously mentioned old garden roses, many of the Bourbons will thrive in our climate. The flowers usually are quite fragrant and produced on large, robust shrubs. Many are repeat flowering.

—By Dan Gill, LSU AgCenter Horticulturist

Upcoming Events

Every Tuesday: *Plant Diagnostic Clinic.* This free clinic is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesdays at the South Santa Rosa Service Center at 5819 Gulf Breeze Pkwy.

February 13, 2007: “Gardening Know-How” sponsored by the Pensacola Federation of Garden Clubs. 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Registration at 8:15 to 9 a.m. Pensacola Garden Center, 1850 North Ninth Avenue. Register by phone at 484-9172.

March 3, 2007: 19th Annual Forestry Conclave and Lumberjack Festival. Lumberjack competition— adult events: all day, children events: 9:00 to 11:00 and junior events: 11:00 to noon. Door prizes all day. Free admission!! Free Tree Seed-

lings will be given out while they last. \$3.00 registration fee for event participation only. Each additional event - \$1.00 per person. Children, Senior Citizens & High School Students Compete for FREE! For additional information call (850) 484-4463 or see the PJC Lumberjack website: www.pjc.edu/milton/lumberjack.

For persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations, please contact the SRC Extension Office at least 5 working days prior to the program so that proper consideration may be given to the request.
(850) 623-3868

Pruning Fruit Trees (cont.)

wood. Because pruning stimulates growth, it is the best means available to assure an annual supply of this essential fruiting wood. Plums also produce fruit on spurs and should not be pruned as much as peaches.

Peaches, nectarines and plums are typically pruned to a three-limb open center form or sometimes four-limb in plums. This method allows sunlight into the tree and enables the fruit to develop proper color. The upper shoots can be tipped to keep trees low enough that the fruit can be harvested without the aid of ladders.

Failure to control tree height will cause the lower branches to be shaded out and the fruiting wood to be too high to harvest without ladders.

Apple and pear trees produce fruit on short spurs that last 10 to 15 years. Excessive pruning will remove the fruiting spurs and reduce crop size. It will also cause excessive non-spur producing wood to be produced, which is non-productive. Apples and pears are normally trained to a central



leader or modified central leader system. Pruning basically consists of thinning out thick areas and removing weak or damaged wood. Excessive pruning can make trees prone to fire blight disease.

Figs produce fruit on current season wood, although some varieties produce an early crop on the previous season's growth. Figs do not need heavy pruning to produce fruiting wood. Pruning consists primarily of removing inward growth when necessary to keep the tree open. Dead, diseased or damaged wood along with suckers and water sprouts should be removed.

Citrus trees require little if any pruning except to remove broken or damaged limbs. Freeze-damaged citrus should not be pruned until June.

The severity of damage can be properly assessed at that time.

—from LSU AgCenter

Questions and Answers

Q: My neighbor told me I needed to add lime to my yard. Should I?

A: We don't recommend adding lime unless a soil test indicates a need.

Soil testing is not something we think of doing very often, but once every year or two, it's not a bad idea. Testing the acidity is probably the most important, and at least once you need to have a complete soil analysis too.

Some plants are very sensitive to the soil acidity. We measure the acidity in pH units. An acid soil is one with a pH below 7 and an alkaline soil is one with a pH above 7. The pH of 7 is considered neutral. Most plants like to grow in the pH range of 5.5 to 6.5, but acid-loving plants are different. Some of these plants include azaleas, blueberries and even your centipede lawn. They all like a pH of about 5 or below.

It's easy to have your soil acidity tested. Start by taking samples throughout the yard or a specific area in the landscape. Maybe you would like to have the soil only from your vegetable garden or azalea bed tested. Gather a number of samples from these areas using a trowel and place them in a bucket. Take the samples from the surface down 4 to 6 inches deep in the ground.

When you have a number of samples in the bucket, mix them. Scoop out about a half-pint of the soil from this composite sample for testing. You can test it yourself with kits available from your garden center or you can contact your local Extension office to see if it offers pH testing. Your Extension office can usually test the soil and then make recommendations as to treatments that might be needed.

At least once you should also have a complete soil test performed. This measures the pH plus the levels of many soil nutrients including phosphorus. The test for this nutrient is very important. If your soil has adequate phosphorus, you may never need to add this nutrient. Contact your local Extension office to obtain the test kits needed to have a

complete soil analysis performed at the University of Florida.

Now, while you are starting to think about spring is a good time to have all your soil tests performed.

Q: How do I care for my houseplants during the winter?

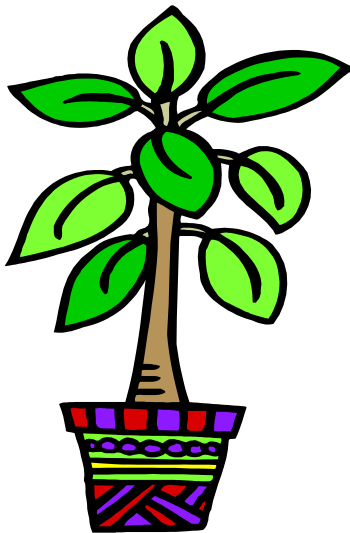
A: With heaters operating frequently, the atmosphere will be drier and soils and plants will dry somewhat more quickly with the continual movement of warm air over and around plants. Correct care will entail more frequent checks of the soil in planters to make certain they do not dry out excessively.

Fertilization during the winter should be limited or eliminated. It is best not to stimulate growth any more than is necessary. Water and fertilizer should be utilized to keep plants healthy, not for accelerated growth. Growth occurring during the winter will often be weaker and paler green in color.

You also need to pay close attention to the amount of light reaching your plants. A good measure of sufficient or insufficient light is the amount of stem growth that occurs between the leaves. That area is called the internode. With insufficient light, that growth will be quite long. If you grow plants such as philodendron or ivy, they can tell you a lot about light. Not only will the leaves be widely spaced on the stems, but the petiole or stem connecting the leaves to the stems will be much longer and weaker. This same symptom can occur during other periods of the year when light is insufficient.

Be sure to check soil moisture frequently, but only water when the soil feels dry to the fingers. Too much water can be more injurious than too little.

Also be sure to give your houseplants a quarter turn every so often to avoid a lean towards the light.



Tips for Valentine Day Roses

For floral arrangements:

- Keep the vase filled or floral foam soaked with warm water. Add fresh, warm water daily. If the water turns cloudy, replace it immediately. If possible, recut stems by removing one to two inches with a sharp knife. Do this under water. This allows the stems to draw in water instead of air.
- Keep flowers in a cool spot (65 to 72 degrees F), away from direct sunlight, heating or cooling vents, directly under ceiling fans, or on top of televisions or radiators. (Appliances like televisions give off heat, causing flowers to dehydrate.)
- If a rose starts to wilt, remove it from the arrangement, and recut the stem under water. Submerge the entire rose in warm water. The rose should revive in one to two hours.

For loose stems:

- If you can't get your flowers in a flower food solution right away, keep them in a cool place.
- Fill a clean, deep vase with water and add the flower food obtained from your florist. Be sure to follow the directions on the package.
- Remove leaves that will be below the waterline. Leaves in water will promote bacterial growth.
- Recut stems under water with a sharp knife and place the flowers in the vase solution you've prepared.



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