

Spring Fruit Tree Care and Maintenance

Spraying:

Obtain and review the [homeowner fruit spray schedule](#) for your particular tree. The schedule starts with dormant oil prior to bud break, and continues specific to each fruit tree type. To avoid risk to pollinators, do not spray with insecticide during bloom. Always read and follow the insecticide label carefully.

Fertilizing and Mulching

Spring and fall are the best times to fertilize. Conserve moisture and reduce resource competition by pulling weeds and mulching the first summer.

Pruning

Pruning, if done properly, has many benefits, including:

- Overall health: Remove dead, diseased or competing branches. This helps to increase air flow which helps control diseases triggered by overly moist conditions and permits light penetration.
- Fruit production: Increased light, balanced with good water and nutrient uptake, increases sugar production. Bloom and fruit set, color, size and quality of mature fruit improves.
- Shape: Properly pruned trees are more easily accessible for maintenance. Landscape is used efficiently when specimens are controlled.
- Strength: Select and train branches to create a stronger framework for fruit support.

Pruning lightly each year is preferable to pruning heavily less frequently – heavy pruning produces extremely vigorous but unproductive growth. This growth upsets the trained shape and demands subsequent pruning.

When pruning:

- Never leave a stub; always cut branches back to another branch or trunk at the tree collar (the ridge of bark at the branch base)
- Cut at a slight angle above the collar to promote healing. Tree wound dressings are not recommended.

To begin training, select foundational (“scaffold”) limbs and plan for overall shape. These should be at a 45 to 60° relative angle to the trunk for optimum weight-bearing strength, lateral vegetative growth and fruit bud formation. Any less than 45° fosters crowding and weak branches.

Dormant pruning may be done January to early March. Assess winter bud damage and prune no more than 1/3 of the wood. If pruning again prior to the dormant season, August in Oklahoma is recommended.

OSU fact sheet [Annual Pruning of Fruit Trees HLA-6228](#) provides further pruning recommendations for your specific tree.

Keep your OSU fact sheets handy and plan your strategy for your fruit trees now. Sound preparation can reap a harvest of enjoyment, rather than a disappointing yield of frustration and expense!

Additional References

Home Tree Fruit Production and Pest Management EPP-7319

<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-3084/EPP-7319web15.pdf>

Home Fruit Planting Guide HLA-6222

<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1015/HLA-6222web2016.pdf>

Tulsa Master Gardeners Lawn and Garden Help – Tree Fruit

http://tulsamastergardeners.org/lawngarden/lq_fruits.html

University of Missouri Fruit Spray Schedules for the Homeowner

<http://tulsamastergardeners.org/PDFs/2015%20MU%20Fruit%20Spray%20Schedule.pdf>

Annual Pruning of Fruit Trees HLA-6228

<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1022/HLA-6228web2015.pdf>