

Advice on Summer Pruning of fruit trees

We recently spent a long afternoon summer pruning the new orchard. In spite of the dry weather it had put on a great amount of growth and fruit... far too much for these newly established trees and for the mowers to cope with. We have noted some strimmer damage on some trunks which we will need to attend to and we still need to do quite a bit of tying in and we will need to replace the tree guards which are now old and very brittle.. We reduced the crops significantly and will ASAP move the pile of pruning and fruit from plot 147. I can recommend this for managing smaller tree forms so have attached some RHS information.

RHS advice on Apples and pears: summer pruning

Summer pruning apples and pears allows sunlight to ripen the fruit and ensures good cropping the following year. This is the main method of pruning for restricted forms such as cordons, espaliers, fans and pyramids.

Quick facts

Suitable for Apples and pears trained as restricted forms

Timing July to September

Summer pruning is mainly for apples and pears trained as restricted forms: [cordon](#), [espalier](#), [fan](#), pyramid, spindlebush. Trees grown as standards or bushes are managed with [winter pruning](#).

When to prune

Summer prune when the bottom third of the new shoots is stiff and woody. Generally, this will be from mid-July for pears and the third week in August for apples and about ten days later in the north. To reduce the possibility of secondary growth it can be left until late August. Judge the exact timing according to the vigour of the plant, the weather and locality.

How to prune

Summer pruning involves cutting back new shoots to allow light to reach the fruit. New shoots are stiff and woody along their bottom third, with dark green leaves and a cluster of leaves at the base.

1. Cut back new shoots (laterals) more than 20cm (8in) long growing from the main stem to three leaves above the basal cluster of leaves. Do not prune new shoots that are less than 20cm (8in) long as they usually terminate in fruit buds
2. Cut back new shoots growing from existing sideshoots (sub-laterals) to one leaf above the basal cluster
3. Remove any upright, vigorous growth completely
4. If secondary growth occurs after summer pruning, remove this in September. If this is a persistent problem, leave some longer shoots unpruned as these will draw up the sap and grow at the expense of secondary growth elsewhere. Cut these back to one bud in spring, as well as any vigorous growth projecting above the level of the supporting wire

Plums: pruning

Plum trees do not require as precise pruning as apples and pears, but still benefit from initial training and the thinning of old wood to ensure they produce as much fruit as possible. Plums are pruned in early spring or mid summer to avoid infection by silver leaf disease.

Quick facts

Suitable for Plums

Timing Early spring or mid-summer (April or July)

When to prune plums

Avoid pruning plums in winter, as it increases the risk of infection by [silver leaf disease](#) to which plums and other *Prunus* species are prone. The best time for pruning is usually spring for young trees and mid-summer for established ones.

How to prune plums

There are three commonly used methods of pruning plums: bush, pyramid and fan.

Bush

The bush is perhaps the most popular method of training and pruning and creates an open-centred tree with a clear stem of 75cm (2½ft). Its ultimate size will depend on the rootstock it is grown on. Trees grafted onto 'Pixy' rootstocks will reach 3m (10ft), 'St. Julien A' 3.6-4.5m (13-15ft) and the 'Brompton' and 'Myrobalan B' 6m (20ft).

The overall aim of pruning is to create an open-centred tree. This begins with the same [formative pruning as apples and pears](#) but, importantly, carried out in early spring.

On established trees, rub out any buds developing on the lower trunk and carefully pull off suckers arising from the rootstock. Pruning is mostly limited to removing crossing, weak, vertical and diseased material. If the plum tree is still crowded then further thinning can be done in July.

Pyramid plums

A pyramid plum tree is considerably smaller than a pruned a bush, and this makes it practical to net against birds. Plums on 'St. Julien A' rootstocks are kept to 2.4m (8ft) and on 'Pixy' rootstocks to 1.8m (6ft).

The pruning of a newly planted tree is the [same as for apples and pears](#). Remember: carried out in April not winter to avoid [silver leaf disease](#).

Afterwards the initial pruning, follow these steps:

- During the first summer, prune in the third week of July when the young shoots have finished growing. Shorten new branches to 20cm (8in), cutting above a downward or outward-pointing bud. Also cut side branches back to a bud at 15cm (6in). Train and tie in the central leader to the stake
- In subsequent years during April, shorten the central leader by two-thirds. Repeat annually until the tree has reached 2.4m (8ft) on a 'St. Julien A' rootstock, or 1.8m (6ft) for 'Pixy', after which, shorten the central leader to 2.5cm (1in) or less each May, to keep the tree at the same height
- Vertical shoots at the top competing with the central leader should be removed in late June

Fan training

A [fan-shaped tree](#) is created by training against a wall or fence with horizontal wires fixed 15cm (6in) (or two brick courses) apart. Trees can be bought as maidens, or partly trained. Expect the height and spread of trees on 'Pixy' rootstock to be 3m (10ft) high by 2m (6½ft) spread and trees on 'St. Julien A' to be 3.6m (12ft) by 2.4m (8ft).

Neglected and overgrown bush trees

Renovating an old, neglected plum tree should be staged over several years. Aim for a well-balanced tree, keeping the centre of the crown free from shoots to allow good

light penetration. Trees respond to larger pruning cuts by sending up a mass of new shoots. Where this happens the shoots will need to be thinned in the summer to leave just one or two.

Controlling vigour

The tying down of young, flexible branches to the horizontal can reduce excess vigour in large, unruly trees. This technique is known as festooning and is best done in the summer and can help prevent trees becoming overgrown.

Ties are left in place until the branch stays naturally at the new position, usually the following spring. Attach one end of the tie to the branch tip and the other end to a stake or the trunk.

Problems

Plums can be heavy croppers, leading to branches breaking under the weight of fruit, so [thinning](#) is important to prevent damage. Branches already broken should be pruned back into undamaged wood, ideally cutting back to a natural fork to avoid leaving stubs.

The other main problems are [silver leaf disease](#), [honey fungus](#), [bacterial canker](#), [pocket plum](#), [plum aphids](#) and [plum moth](#).