

Wairarapa Organics Pruning Workshop

Sunday 12 August 2007

Did you know that it is recommended that in winter to prune apples, pears, feijoas and figs only? Stone fruit are best straight after fruiting. This was one of the snippets of knowledge gained from the pruning workshop at Claire Bleakley's house with Steve White.

Steve ran an interesting and informative afternoon about pruning old, new and teenage trees. For those who could not make the workshop Steve said you need to:

- thoroughly clean tools in a bucket containing 2 litres of water and a good cup of Janola to kill any disease on secateurs and pruning tools.
- Soak for 1 minute between each tree.



Glenis and Ron cleaning tools

Steve also said to remember the 3 D's regarding the bits to prune out: Get rid of the dead, diseased and delinquent wood on branches and trees.



Steve demonstrating details of the 3D's.

Looking at the tree:

What shape do you want? A bowl or a central leader? It is your choice. Everyone has slightly different ways to prune, there is no real right or wrong.

How high do you want the tree? Fruit trees are usually picked. Keeping the trees to a height that is easy and safe to pluck is a very good measure for looking at how high a tree should be. Any higher and it's food for the birds.

Apple and Pear Trees

When starting on the tree take out all dead and diseased wood then look to open out the middle to let air in by removing any branches that cross into the centre or rub onto one another. For my old trees we decided to leave a third for this year's fruit, prune a third for next season's fruit spurs and cut a third of the old wood to force new growth for replacement.

Apple and Pear trees have a natural cone shape. The new shoot normally has about seven to ten buds from last season. The top bud goes straight up while each bud further down grows at an angle. These buds get progressively larger as you go down the new shoot. So if you prune about four buds from the base of the new shoot the angle is flatter and you can force a sideways branch.

With the effect of the many Featherston windblasts, trees mostly have branches facing away from the wind leaving one side bare of branches. To remedy this, the young apples and pears were pruned to buds and branches that faced the southerly wind as the trees had a tendency to grow or be blown to the north and consecutively have no south facing branches. Steve chooses a south facing branch and pruned it to an inward bud about four buds up from last season's new growth. This should force the flatter angled bud below to go to the wind side.

Apples fruit on one-year old wood. So after a "number one" prune on two old apple and pear trees that had not received any real TLC (tender loving care) for at least 17 years, Claire

is hoping to get some new wood for fruiting in the following season.

Feijoas. These are small bushes with many branches close to the ground. These were pruned to one trunk with the bottom-most branches at least 20 centimetres off the ground. Feijoas fruit on new growth.

Figs were pruned to bring the height down to around 2.5 metres. It was noticed that where branches had been previously pruned they had formed about four branches from the cut. These had many small fruits forming on them.

GRAFTING

To end we had a short demonstration on grafting. Steve had brought some apple stocks and grafting scions.

Firstly we selected a stock. Then scored 2.5 cm cut into the outer green bark (Cambium) and lifted it off being careful not to break the bark.



Ric with his stock

We then selected a graft piece and cut it on two sides opposite each other to have a flat piece with whole intact bark on the edges. Just like sharpening a pencil with a blade.



Cutting the bark

We then gently eased the flat scion edge under the bark of the stock making sure the bark folded over the scion so that the cambium touched each other. This is where the growth will be. Once inserted we bound it up with tape - you can use any waterproof tape.



Here we are with finished stocks and a cuppa tea!
Steve, Claire Ron, Glenis, Johannah, Ric.