

## Summer pruning of fruit trees

Steve White ran Wairarapa Organics Summer Pruning workshop at the property of Ric and Daphne Geisler in Martinbrough where a variety of stone fruit trees were ready for pruning. (pip fruit are best done in mid winter)

The main tools and equipment for pruning are:

- secateurs,
- loppers,
- pruning saw.
- A 2 litre bucket of water with a tablespoon of janola

All tools need to be kept sharp. The janola is to prevent cross contamination of diseases between trees and to keep all cuts as sterile as possible.

Steve reminded us of the three pruning aims beginning with “D”. Prune out wood that is **diseased, dead or delinquent**.



**Looking for Codlin Moth**

When looking at a tree in preparation for pruning, look for dead wood, diseased wood and wood that would not be productive e.g. water shoots. Prune these bits out first and then look at the tree to see what needs to be done.

The main reasons for pruning are to:

- Give the tree a good shape. The most common shapes are a vase shape or with a central leader.
- Keep the height and width to a level suitable for picking.
- Limit fruit numbers in young trees.
- Let air and light circulate through the tree.

### ***Rule of thumb***

Do not prune too heavily and prune to make sure there is fruit for next year. Fruit tree species that bear large fruit can be pruned harder than species with smaller fruit. For example: apples and pears are pruned harder than apricots, peaches and nectarines. Cherries and plums are pruned lighter still. Citrus are pruned very lightly.

- Young trees are supple and bend more so prune less.
- Old trees can have old wood cut out to enable the regeneration of new wood for replacement spurs.

Stone fruit is best pruned after fruiting in late summer. Pip fruit in mid-winter.

Bio- Dynamic principles suggest that pruning is best in a descending moon cycle.

- New growth is optimally pruned to get branches growing to angles between 40 and 50 degrees for best fruiting. These branches will develop more fruiting buds.
- By cutting the top bud it forces the hormonal growth of auxin into the lower buds and the energy goes into flowering buds.
- Branches that go straight up have less fruiting buds.
- Make tiers of fruiting branches about 30 – 50 cm apart.
- Pegging of branches in September / October to produce branches growing at angles between 40 – 50 degrees will aid in the production of flower buds. The pegs need to be removed in November.
- For trees that suffer from strong winds. Prune the leeward side facing away from the wind heavier as it will force growth to the windward side. Try not to prune on the windward side unless absolutely necessary.
- Prune trees to a manageable height for picking of fruit.
- Sterilise tools between trees.



**Checking for disease**

### ***Apricots, Peaches, Nectarines***

Ric had chosen a vase shape for his trees. Apricots fruit on second year growth. He had little dead or diseased wood so we pruned branches that were growing into the centre and stopping the light and air circulating.

New growth was pruned to back to a point that left four buds on the branch. Although it would have been ideal to take the height of each tree down to a manageable level, this would need to be done in stages so that the trees were not pruned too harshly.

### ***Cherry, Plums***

Ric had chosen a pyramid shape for these trees. As cherries fruit on second year growth they need light pruning. Prune branches in opposites with around 30 cms between each branch level to make tiers of branches.

To encourage growth on the windward side, Steve made a small notch into the bark with a sharp pruning knife directly under a collar of some branches. The reason for the notch was to force the energy into making outward growth.

### ***Apples***

It was observed that some trees were suffering from the lack of water and fruit near the stalk it was very cracked. This cracking can point to a lack of Boron and/or zinc. Watering and the application of a handful of fine seaweed powder around the base of the tree or used as a foliar spray is a good organic treatment.

Black holes leading to the pips of apples caused by Codlin moth were seen. In spring the moths lay their eggs in the forming fruit and the caterpillars eat their way out to pupate in the ground or on the tree. If cardboard is wrapped around the trunk in late summer the caterpillars move into the corrugations. The cardboard can then be removed and burnt helping reduce numbers over wintering on the tree. However, if the Codlin moth reaches the ground it is unlikely to re-infect the tree in an organic orchard due to the predator numbers in the understory.

### ***Pear slug***

On the cherries and pears there were small black slugs (pear slug) that eat the leaves. Removal by rubbing or garlic spray is an effective control agent.



**Pear slug on damaged leaf**

### ***Mulching***

Mulch heavily to the drip line of trees to stop water loss. Make sure that the mulch does not touch the trunk of the tree as it can lead to the establishment of disease. Keep grass away from the base of the trunk as it harbours bugs and fungus.

### ***Lichen growth***

Lichen does not usually cause a problem. If it is growing on a bud rub it away as it stops buds from shooting. Lichen is an acid loving plant and is inhibited with alkaline washes such as a baking soda wash.

### ***The bonus***

After we had finished the pruning at Ric and Daphne's property we went over to Steve's place to pick some of his wonderful organic apples.



**The apple pickers at the end of the day**

It was a fantastic day and we would like to thank Steve for his generosity and time and Ric for letting us use his trees for practising on!