

# Pruning deciduous fruit trees - Pome fruits

Autumn's *Canberra Organic* featured an article on the hows, whys and whens of pruning stone fruit. This issue, we focus on the pomes.

The most commonly grown pome fruits are varieties of apples and pears. Other less frequently seen members of this group include quinces, crab apples, loquats and medlars.

Pruning of apples and pears is traditionally carried out during winter while the trees are dormant. Any pruning should always include the removal of dead, damaged or diseased wood and the removal of any suckers which have grown up from below the graft.

## Apples

Apples are a medium sized deciduous tree which will grow to 10 or 15 metres if left unpruned. Either dwarfing rootstock or regular pruning is used to restrict apples to a more manageable size.

As with all fruit tree pruning it is important to know where the next years fruit will occur so that fruiting wood is not inadvertently pruned off.

Apples fruit mainly on short permanent spurs arising from wood older than two years. Some varieties such as Jonathon and

Golden Delicious will also produce smaller quantities of fruit on the ends of the previous seasons growth.

Young apple trees can be trained either to a vase shape or a pyramid shape. Whichever shape you chose aim to produce four or five main limbs with a couple of secondary limbs arising from each. Once this framework is in place annual pruning is directed to the development of fruiting spurs arising either directly from the main branches or from well placed laterals.

Remove any inward growing branches, any crossing or rubbing branches and any overly vigorous vertical growth. Leaders should be cut back to control the overall height of the tree. Pruning to an existing well placed lateral is preferable to pruning to a bud as it will result in less rampant vertical growth the following season.

Laterals arising directly from the main branches should be pruned back by half to two thirds to encourage them to develop fruiting spurs. Prune to a downward facing bud to produce more horizontal growth and encourage the earlier formation of fruiting spurs.

Any inappropriately placed or crowded laterals can be removed entirely. For those varieties which also fruit on the previous seasons lateral growth, the laterals should be thinned rather than pruned back.

Once developed, fruiting spurs may need thinning to ensure the fruit has adequate room to develop without over-crowding.

## Pears

The pruning of pears is very similar to that of apples.

However many varieties of pear commonly bear on one year old laterals as well as on spurs arising from older wood.

For this reason some well placed laterals are left unpruned to develop spurs along their length. Other laterals can be either be shortened back to a couple of buds to develop into a permanent spur or removed entirely.



*Fruiting spurs on a Nashi pear*

## Quinces

Quinces require less formal pruning than either apples or pears in order to bear well. Fruit is borne singly on one year old laterals and also on short spurs which arise from these.

Annual pruning need only remove over crowded growth and shorten any long thin growth to enable it to better support the heavy fruit.

## References and further reading

- Glowinski, L 1991, *The complete book of Fruit Growing in Australia*, Lothian Books
- Kilpatrick, D 1968, *Pruning for the Australian gardener*, Rigby
- Baxter, P 1981 *Growing Fruit in Australia*

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