Pruning Apple Trees



VIDEO

Pruning Apple Trees

Published September 13, 2022

TRANSCRIPT:

TERRY ALLEN:
Hi. I'm Terry Allen with SEEDS OF CHANGE™ and today we're here at Gabriel Farms taking to Lucy who is going to teach us how to prune apple trees.

LUCY OLSEN:
Welcome to Gabriel Farm. We are a 14-acre certified organic farm here in Sebastopol, California, and we grow Asian pears and apples. We have nine varieties of Asian pears and 15 varieties of apples. And we're open every Fall for U-Pick Apples.

TERRY ALLEN:
Okay, let's get to work learning how to prune these trees.

LUCY OLSEN:
Most of your pruning is going to be done by a good pair of hand pruners. We have a little file to keep those sharp. We also have loppers with a little more extension for larger wood. We have a hand saw for wood if your wood is particularly large. And if your tree is large we have a pole pruner to help cut the wood way up high, or you can use a ladder.

PRUNE DURING WINTER TIME
Pruning is done in the winter time when the trees are dormant, and it's important to

provide the shape for the tree and also to stimulate fruit production. So today we're going to be cutting back the tops of these and taking out a few limbs are kind of crossing, and doing some other pruning maneuvers.

Apple trees are grafted, so you have the fruit wood up top and it remains true to type, and you have the root stock which will help with disease resistance and ultimately determine the size of the tree, for dwarf, semi dwarf or standard, which is a full-sized tree.

TERRY ALLEN:
The trees that you get from SEEDS OF CHANGE™ are on an MM111 rootstock, which is a semi-dwarf tree. Ultimately, that will produce a tree that's about 15 feet tall, which is about the size of these trees right here.

LUCY OLSEN:
This is about a three year old tree, and you can identify the grafting union down here.

PRUNE OUT ROOT SUCKERS
This would be considered a root sucker, which gets pruned out. The root suckers sap energy from the tree, so we prune those out to allow the fruit to take precedence. Pruning out root suckers is fairly easy. Sometimes you'll have many radiating around the outside. This one just has one sucker, and we cut it at the base.

On this limb, you can see where the pruning cut was made last year. And last year's extension growth, which is about two feet, and then some extension buds that will this year form new limbs — part of the scaffolding of the tree — and some fruit buds.

TERRY ALLEN:
And you can see that the vertical branches do not have many fur or flower-type buds. They have leaf buds, so they can build the canopy, whereas the older wood forms the spur systems and the fruiting buds.

LUCY OLSEN:
Apple trees are pruned in two main shapes: We have the Open Vase variety, or the Central Leader, of which this would be an example. From the center of the tree a main scaffold limb comes up.

CENTRAL LEADER SHAPE
This would be considered a modified Central Leader because it has these radiating limbs as well as well as the primary limb in the center of the tree.

OPEN VASE SHAPE
This tree is an example of an unpruned Open Vase shape. The central limb on the tree has been removed, leaving the outer scaffolding limbs to express in the shape of a vase. The advantages of an open vase is that more sunlight can penetrate into the tree. Sunlight means better growth, better fruit production and less disease.

TWO TYPES OF CUTS: HEADING CUT & THINNING CUT
In pruning trees, there's two main types of cuts. The Heading Cut, which cuts back last year's growth. And the Thinning Cut, which removes any crossing, diseased or damaged wood.

When making a Heading Cut, you'll want to choose an outward-facing bud that will continue the growth away from the center of the tree. You make your cut at about a 45 degree

angle, taking care not to cut into the bud wood down below.

STAND BACK AND ASSESS
Alright, let's get started. When pruning a tree, since every tree is unique, first I like to stand back and look at the whole tree, analyze if it has any dead, diseased or crossing wood for elimination, and also evaluate the total structure of the tree.

REMOVE WITH THINNING CUTS: DEAD, DISEASED, DAMAGED OR CROSSING BRANCHES
To begin with, I'm going to remove any unwanted wood. There's one here in the center that's probably going to get in the way of other branches — so that would be a Thinning Cut. Then we have our Heading Cuts. Usually I'll choose a bud that is outward facing to continue the development of the tree.

HEADING CUTS CONTROL SIZE
These are all Heading Cuts. The Heading Cuts will also stimulate the tree to produce more limbs and also to set fruiting spurs.

TERRY ALLEN:
Here you can see how a spur system develops. The spurs produce fruit off the spur wood.

LUCY OLSEN:
Looking at this tree, it's a modified Central Leader. There's a couple of limbs in the middle that we'll probably remove to avoid any crowding in there. And I might leave a spur here for fruit production, as well as here. Probably do a Heading Cut on this scaffold limb to encourage it to branch out. And these upper limbs I would just head back. They will continue to grow. The Heading Cuts will again allow these to branch out and allow more space for fruit production.

Looks pretty good. Each tree will present new opportunities for growth and development each year. We'll come back next year and see what we need to do next.

Once a year has reached full maturity, and this is quite an old tree here, pruning is really about annually about maintaining the original size and shape that's been established. This tree has already been pruned this year and the cuts were primarily made at the top to control the extension growth of the tree.

PRUNING IS A MULTI-YEAR PROCESS
Pruning a fruit tree in its early stages of development is a multi-year process, where each year you have new opportunities to analyze how the tree responded to your previous year's cuts and decide how you want to cut for this year.

TERRY ALLEN:
Thank you so much Lucy. That was really helpful. Now I know how to prune my trees. And I'm definitely coming back here at harvest time to taste all these delicious heirloom varieties that you have here.

LUCY OLSEN:
Thanks for coming out, Terry.

…
For more great organic gardening tips, visit SeedsOfChange.com.

Start gardening now



When & How to Start Seeds Indoors

Discover how simple it is to start growing seeds indoors with helpful tips for planting, watering, and preparing them for transplant in your garden.

EXPLORE



Preparing Soil For Planting an Organic Vegetable Garden

Learn how to prepare your soil to support the growth of healthy plants, from proper depth and aeration to using compost and fertilizer.

EXPLORE

Planning an Organic Vegetable Garden

There are five keys to setting up a successful organic vegetable garden, and we want to share them with you.

EXPLORE

How To Make An Organic Compost Pile

See how easy it is to make your own nutrient-rich compost by using a few simple ingredients and investing a little time, effort, and backyard engineering.

EXPLORE

Source URL: *https://www.seedsofchange.com/articles-and-videos/pruning-apple-trees*