



Home Orchard & Fruit Gardens

Planting Fruit Trees in your back yard is a wonderful choice. The visions of bushels of home grown apples, cherries and plums can be realized and is being experienced by many successful home orchards. However the reality is that a very low percentage of Home Orchards will be successful, not for any reasons other than poor quality trees to begin with and poor or little practical advice to proceed with through the years.

Pennsylvania Pride Brand Fruit Trees are quality trees, grown to give you the best opportunity to reach your goals. Because we grow our Fruit Trees in containers, potted on the nursery and not sold bare root or quickly potted in the Garden Center each spring, our Fruit Trees transplant easily and the chances of not only surviving but producing in the years to come are greatly enhanced. In addition, much of the required early life pruning for these Fruit Trees has been done on the nursery by professionals allowing you to follow our basic desired structure that promotes larger yields for your tree in future years. In fact, many of our Fruit Trees will produce fruit in the very first year for you.

I do not have a home orchard, one of my biggest regrets now 22 years later. I thought about it every year, many times and my fear of failure, lack of experience and just not knowing what to do first stopped me each spring. I am a professional grower who specializes in trees and I was afraid to start my own orchard, how much worse is this for you? Planting, pruning, spraying, and planning all may seem overwhelming, this is why we decided to add Fruit Trees to our product line. I know that Pennsylvania Pride can put to rest all your fears and provide answers and support for you at all phases of your home orchard.

My first experience with Fruit Trees was stealing apples from my neighbor's trees growing up. Sounds awful I know, but I looked forward to a few apples each fall and was willing to risk Old Mr. Meyers catching me. He didn't have many trees but did they fruit and were they ever good! One late summer, he did catch me and carried me home to my Dad where it was agreed I would work for Mr. Meyers in his gardens next year, all year! Some punishment, all the Strawberries, Blueberries and other fruit and vegetables I could eat. Mr. Meyers later came to my wedding and we became good friends and I owe him much, this is where I discovered my love of growing. Back to Fruit Trees.....

A few things to consider before planting:

- Avoid Frost pockets if possible, late spring frosts can greatly reduce yields. Look for slopes on your property that provide good air drainage. Much of our nursery is on hillsides and our last frost date is a full month earlier than what is normal, a great benefit for growing.
- For larger yields, Fruit Trees enjoy good soil. Continue to add good compost in early years of growth and be sure to plant in well-drained soil, this is imperative to success. Well-drained means no puddling, soil that dries normally, not too quickly but for sure not too slowly.
- Look for an area that provides full sun when possible as well.

Three important factors to get you started, to the extent you cannot provide these perfectly your harvests will be affected going forward, but even if you meet these goals at 50%, we can be successful still, just requires a little more time and effort.

Fruit Tree Pruning: We (you & I) prune our Fruit Trees because it invigorates the plant, increases size of fruit, provides the proper form or shape that allows for light penetration and the ability to pick the fruit going forward as the trees mature. How to prune is very difficult to explain, the greatest aid to pruning is to carefully look and observe the responses to our prunes on the nursery and your prunes going forward. This will allow you to draw on your own experiences each year, the key to growing anything is observation!



Our goal in pruning young Fruit Trees is to train branches to spread and to provide the main framework of the tree. From the start you must remember that more branches may lead to more fruit, but fewer branches leads to larger & cleaner fruit, fewer apples but you can eat them!

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Timing of pruning is pretty simple, late winter or early spring in your area. My rule of thumb is this - the first day I can sense spring (you know that feeling or smell) this is when to prune the Fruit Trees, always before bud break! On the nursery we prune at bud swell, even on our non-bearing ornamental fruit trees like Weeping Cherry. I learned years ago that pruning at the right time can increase growth dramatically.

It is advisable to delay pruning on Peach, Nectarine, and Apricot until bud swell, but still prior to bud break. These trees are susceptible to late-season winter injury and canker infection caused by improper prune wounds. Never cut close to the stem and always leave 1" of the branch. This avoids many problems later on.

Apples, Pears, Sweet Cherries, and many Plums are upright growers and we need to keep the central leader under control. The idea is to make this tree shorter keeping the fruit lower for easier spraying or harvest later in the season. We do this by identifying the leader and cutting this branch about 25% the first year and not allowing the leader to re-establish going forward. Our goal with these trees is to have kind of a low-spreading Christmas tree shape overall. The next is to identify the lateral branches, about

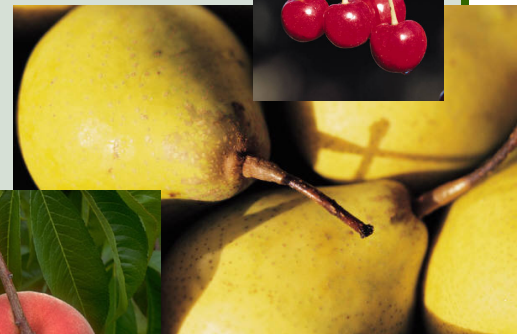
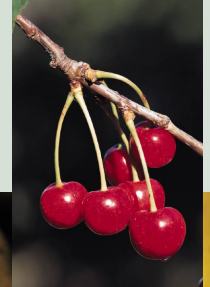
4—5 on most small trees at planting. This will establish our framework for all future years. And always remember no branches below 24".

Peaches, Nectarines, Sour Cherries, Apricots and some Plums have low spreading habits and require even more good air flow through the tree that can aid in fighting diseases. On these trees we want to remove the 'leader' all together and focus our mainframe around five horizontal branches. These will have kind of an ugly form, but very productive. You'll notice the beginning of these forms on your Pennsylvania Pride Fruit trees.

The last step for pruning is kind of fun. This summer (and maybe for three or four summers to come) we need to train our chosen branches to grow out and then a little downward. We do this by using wood to separate and push branches away from the central stem or we can even use clothespins on young branches we are developing. Weights or small bags of rocks tied to branches will hold them down to desired levels. These training tools can remain in place through the fall season and remove around Thanksgiving time. You would repeat this effort each year or when needed.

Summary, get started and get over any fear, the end result is worth the effort! Find your best planting location and begin to focus only on the 'mainframe' of your tree. This will make for a very successful first year! Next month we will discuss pruning of maturing and mature trees and talk a bit about 'cross pollination'.....OH MY!

The Pennsylvania Pride Grow Team is always available to answer questions through out the year. Email us at askthegrowteam@pennsylvaniapride.com—we would love to hear from you!



- Don Eaton
- Pennsylvania Pride Grow Team