

How to Prune Peach Trees

Fruit trees in general, and peach trees in particular, require a great deal of pruning every year. Pruning opens the tree up to allow sunlight penetration (important for fruit color) and air movement (important for disease management and pesticide coverage). Too much shading on peach twigs can kill the twig in one growing season and, eventually, no fruiting wood will be present in the lower part of the tree.

Some basic steps can be taken in pruning peach trees that will help the tree produce quality fruit. One of the first steps is to cut out most, if not all of the vigorous upright growth – often called water sprouts. Fruit on this type of growth is usually of poor quality and water sprouts contribute greatly to shading lower branches. When cutting out upright growth, it is important to prune it all the way to the branch it originated from or else you will end up with more problems than when you started.

The next step is to prune out any dead or diseased wood. This type of twig will be obvious with a dried out, grayish appearance. Dead wood is very brittle and can often be broken out by hand. Also at this time remove any old fruit still hanging on the tree.

During the growing season branches and twigs will often break from fruit load or winds. Even though the twig may still be alive the break wound is attractive to insect pests like the lesser peach tree borer. Cut broken twigs out to at least below the broken area and, preferably, to where the twig originates from the branch.

Finally, cut out any crossing limbs. Fruit grown on crossing limbs will often rub on other branches around them, which may set them up for disease problems later on. Crossing limbs will often shade each other out producing more dead wood to be pruned out next season.

Many people are hesitant to prune out much wood, thinking that they are reducing the number of fruit they are going to pick. The amount of fruit will be reduced with proper pruning, but the quality of fruit left will be far superior than if the tree was not pruned. Also remember to remove and/or destroy any prunings or dried out fruit. Wood and fruit left on the ground around the tree can be a source for future disease problems during the growing season.

Pruning is just one of the practices needed to help the tree produce large, quality fruit. Shortly after the tree has finished blooming the excessive fruit must be removed so that the tree can support the fruit load and help the remaining fruit to reach a larger size. Also pesticide sprays, either conventional or organic, must be applied during certain times of the year to help control insects like Japanese beetles and diseases such as brown rot and scab. These topics will be covered at later dates.

BEFORE



AFTER



Eliminate vigorous upright growth



Cut out dead and diseased wood



Eliminate broken branches



Cut out crossing twigs and branches