

Everyone knows you prune fruit trees in the winter when they are fully dormant, right? Well, not exactly. Here are some of the cases in which summer pruning (June-September) may be preferable and even essential to do at this time rather than waiting for winter:

1. Old trees with moderate to high vigor that have grown too tall or that have been topped or butchered in the year or two previously;
2. Young trees with excessive vigor, i.e., more than two feet of new growth. This applies to any type of fruit tree, but is particularly applicable to plums, apricots, cherries, and peaches. More on this later;
3. Cherry trees of any age that tend to be getting too tall and out of reach for anything but the birds;
4. Peach, apricot, and plum trees that send up vigorous, non-fruiting shoots (2-4 feet) in the interior of the tree;
5. Non-fruiting branches of pears and other fruit types that tend to become too rigid and unbending before they have the opportunity to carry a crop load. Explanation to follow.

Here is an explanation of why summer pruning is sometimes justified and, in fact, preferred.

Dormant pruning, in fact all pruning, is a *dwarfing* process. A non-pruned tree always will be larger than a pruned tree. Pruning removes plant tissue that developed as a result of photosynthesis, which occurs in the leaves during the growing season. Dormant pruning results in *local* stimulation of growth in the vicinity of the cut, so it may seem as though it is resulting in more growth. Summer pruning, on the other hand, reduces the photosynthetic factory production and provides little or no local stimulation of growth.

Looking back at the examples of summer pruning above, can you now see why this type of pruning can be the preferred method in some situations? Let's go into a little more detail with the examples.

1. Old trees—apples, pears, plums, and cherries, especially. First, be sure that these older trees are in generally good health and vigor. They may not be carrying a crop, better if they are not cropping heavily, and better if they are in the "off" year of production. On the other hand, if the trees have made only a few inches of new growth by the first of July, it is better to delay pruning until the following dormant season. Once you have decided the trees are good candidates for summer pruning, look at the upper part of the tree canopy to see if there are major vertical or otherwise upright branches that can be cut back to similar-sized lower branches, particularly ones growing more closely to the horizontal position. These branches may come from deep within the tree, and even may be one of the major trunks. This can open up the entire center of the tree to better light distribution on the remaining branches. *Never* cut back major branches, leaving a bare stub. Always try to cut back to a branch of similar size. In this way you may be able to reduce or avoid the production of "water sprouts", so commonly seen on trees butchered with a chain saw during the dormant season.
2. Young trees with excessive vigor. Here's my "rule of thumb" for pruning young trees. Year one (planting year): concentrate on training new branches to have good branch angles (>30 degrees from the vertical) with spreaders, toothpicks (when very young), weights, or tie-downs to stakes in the ground. Remove only branches that are competing with the leader (topmost shoot) or are too close to other more desirable branches. Year two and maybe year three (depending on the vigor imparted by the rootstock): leave the tree alone to develop spurs and fruit buds. Once the tree comes into production, then let fruiting help to shape the tree. Too many fruits may bend the branches below the horizontal (not good). Thin or prop the branches to keep them above the horizontal. Some fruit trees, especially plums, pears, or even vigorous

varieties of apple, such as Gravenstein and Jonagold, may still make excessive growth (more than 24 inches annually). Removing some of this growth in summer will slow down growth and possibly will enhance fruit development on adjacent branches, reduce disease and insect infestation, and generally open the tree to easier access.

3. Sweet cherry trees on the common rootstocks (Mazzard and Mahaleb, sometimes referred to as standard and semi-dwarf stocks). They tend to be strongly upright in growth habit, but by spreading them when young, right from the first year on, you can reduce this vertical growth, though only temporarily. The branches still tend to be 'heaven' bound. Newly developed rootstocks, referred to as Gisela 5, 6, or 12, enable one to keep a cherry tree within a reasonable height. In my orchard I allow them a space of 8'x8'x8' and hope to be able to hold them to this box size by summer pruning entirely. If you have the standard or semi-dwarf type of cherry, prune the vertical growth immediately after harvest (mid July). If the tree does not have a crop, you can prune it in mid June, removing upward-growing shoots back into two-year and older wood. The earlier pruning will stimulate moderate new growth, which may or may not be pruned again later, depending on how large you permit the tree to become.
 4. Peach, apricot, and plum trees, especially those that have a light or non-existent crop (poor pollination, frost or cold) may send up shoots, often from the interior of the tree. These shoots can grow 3-4 feet in one season, often forming side shoots on these vigorous, non-bearing branches. You should easily be able to identify them. They should be removed entirely or cut back to one-half to two-thirds of their length in July or August.
 5. Non-fruiting branches of pears and other fruits. Normally, pear shoots grow vigorously upright in the first and second years, but develop fruiting spurs and fruit by the third year, which tend to pull the branches over to a more horizontal position. Cutting these branches back too soon will cause them to stiffen, delay fruiting, and result in a taller tree than if left to bend naturally. However, if the pear branch does not crop, it may need to be spread to at least a 60-degree angle from the trunk or even be removed in favor of smaller branches that haven't lost their bending ability. Late June to mid August is the best time to do this.
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FRUIT VARIETIES FOR VASHON ISLAND

COMPILED BY BOB NORTON

There are many fruit varieties (cultivars) that can be grown successfully on Vashon and throughout Western Washington. Some are easy to grow, have pest and disease resistance and can be grown on dwarfing rootstocks for easier maintenance. Others, possibly with superior quality, are more difficult to grow, may require diligent pest and disease contact and may require more sophisticated management strategies. To make the best decision as to which varieties best suit your particular site, I would recommend you obtain Extension Bulletin 0937, from Washington State University Bulletin Office: 800.723.1763 or online at <http://pubs.wsu.edu>. This bulletin describes varieties and culture of most of the fruits that we can grow successfully in this region.

The listing, which follows, names some of my favorites, new and old, which may be easier to grow and fruit on Vashon, based on their resistance to diseases, or ability to set fruit in our cool, humid climate. All varieties are listed in the approximate order of ripening.

APPLES Resistant or immune to apple scab

Williams' Pride	Early red, dessert
Akane	Striped red, mild flavor, dessert
Holstein	Complex flavor, sweet tart, dual purpose
Karmijn de Sonnaville	Requires storage for best quality, dual purpose
Liberty	Excellent McIntosh type, dessert

APPLES - Not scab immune but highly desirable

Gravenstein	Highly vigorous, scab susceptible, but still worth growing
Elstar	Excellent for cooking and dessert
Honeycrisp	Excellent storage quality, dessert type
Early Fuji	(Beni Shogun, September Wonder or Auvil Early strains) Dessert apple, good storage
Spartan	Dessert apple, good storage, medium size
Red Jonagold (Rubinstar strain)	Dual purpose, large size, scab susceptible

APPLE VARIETIES WITH PROBLEMS

Yellow Transparent	Short life, drops, good for sauce and pie
Gala	Scab
Golden Delicious	Scab
Ginger Gold	Scab
Empire	Scab
King	Scab
Cameo	Too late maturing
Pink Lady	Too late maturing
Granny Smith	Too late maturing

PEAR (European)

Orcas	Ripe mid-Sept, similar to Bartlett but less prone to disease
Rescue	Pick mid-Sept, large fruit, good for canning and fresh eating
Concorde	Pick late-Sept, early Oct, excellent quality, stores well, productive
Comice	Pick late-Sept, excellent quality, stores until Christmas
Conference	Pick early Oct, excellent late keeper

PEAR VARIETIES WITH PROBLEMS

Bartlett	Highly susceptible to pear scab (similar to apple scab); not recommended without a spray program
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ASIAN PEAR

Shinseiki	Pick early Sept, yellow skin
Chojuro	Mid to late Sept, russet, tan skin, pick when they taste good from the tree

PLUM / PRUNE

Methley	Mid to late July, red skin and flesh, sweet, prolific, needs pollinizer like Beauty
Beauty	Late July to early August, red skin, yellow flesh, preferred to Santa Rosa, which does not set well in our climate
Imperial Epineuse	Late July to mid August, lavender skin, European plum, semi-freestone, excellent quality
Shiro	Late July, round, yellow, very juicy, prolific, Japanese plum, eat fresh
Italian	August, easy to grow, dual purpose
Autumn Sweet (for trial)	Latest ripening plum, purple, suitable for fresh eating or drying

PEACH / NECTARINE

Frost	Mid August, semi-freestone, leaf curl resistant
Avalon Pride (for trial)	Leaf curl resistant
Hardired Nectarine	Excellent quality, but extremely susceptible to leaf curl

CHERRY – sweet

Lapins	Mid to late July, self-fruitful, resistant to fruit cracking
Sweetheart	Late July, self-fruitful, cracking resistant, heavy cropping, especially on dwarfing rootstocks (may need thinning)

The common sweet cherries, Bing and Rainier can be grown in our area but are highly susceptible to fruit cracking if it rains at harvest time.

CHERRY – tart (sour)

Montmorency	Standard variety, clear juice
Balaton	New variety with dark flesh & juice
Surefire	Very precocious and productive – new

APRICOT

Rarely productive unless we have a warm, dry period during bloom. Definitely requires fungicide sprays to control fungus disease of bloom and fruit.

Puget Gold Low acid variety that seems to set better than other varieties.

OTHER FRUITS & NUTS

Persimmon	Izu
Paw Paw	Need walls and sunshine
Aronia	Dark purple juice, very astringent
Kiwi	Arguta - hardy
	Hayward - large fruit
Grapes – Table	Interlaken - seedless (white),
	Canadice (pink)
	Mars (black)
Grapes - Juice	Lynden Blue (Concord type)

As to the source of these and other varieties of fruit trees, here are some of the possibilities:

1. Local nurseries specializing in fruit trees (alphabetical)

Biringer Nursery

Best Road

Mt Vernon, WA

Tel: 1.360.848.5151

(This nursery supplies many nurseries and garden centers in W Washington with high quality nursery stock.)

Burnt Ridge Nursery, Inc.

432 Burnt Ridge Road

Onalaska, WA 98570

Tel: 360.985.2873

Email: mail@burntridgenursery.com

Website: www.burntridgenursery.com

Cloud Mountain Farm
6906 Goodwin Road
Everson, WA 98247
Tel: 360.966.5859
E-mail: info@cloudmountainfarm.com
Website: www.cloudmountainfarm.com

Hartman Nursery
713 21st Street S.E.
Puyallup, WA 98372-4758
Tel: 253.848.1484
E-mail: b_jhartman@juno.com
Website: www.hartmannursery.com

One Green World
28696 S. Cramer
Mollala, OR 97038
Toll Free: 1.877.353.4028
E-mail: jgilbert@oregonsbest.com
Website: www.onegreenworld.com

Raintree Nursery
391 Butts Road
Morton, WA 98356
Tel: 360.496.6400
Email: customerservice@raintreenursery.com
Website: www.raintreenursery.com

2. Purchase scionwood at one of the Western Cascade Fruit Society's spring fruit shows or from WSU's NW Washington Research & Extension Center in Mt. Vernon. Their web page is www.mtvernon.wsu.edu/researchandextension/treefruit/scionwood.jan30deadline.

3. Western Cascade Fruit Society

There are 7 chapters throughout Western Washington. Members of each chapter learn grafting through field days and demonstrations. Our chapter of the Vashon Island Fruit Club has one or two grafting sessions annually in March and again in July or August. The club buys or propagates rootstocks for various fruits and sells grafted trees when available.