



Grow Great Fruit

ESSENTIALS COURSE



[WEEK 6 – LATE SUMMER]



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WATERING YOUR TREES WITHOUT A DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEM

There's no fixed rule about how much water a fruit tree needs, but a mature tree carrying a heavy crop might use up to 200 litres per week, and possibly more in extremely hot, windy weather. Whatever irrigation system you're using, try to figure out how many litres it's delivering, so you can estimate how long, or how often you'll need to water. You'll also need to back up your maths with observations of both the tree, and the soil. If your trees start wilting, and don't recover overnight, you've left it too long between waterings.

It's best to slowly deliver the water over a period of 4–6 hours to give it a chance to soak in. The ground should end up obviously damp, but it should drain quite quickly—if the soil stays saturated for more than a few hours, give it less next time.

This time of year is often when we experience the hottest weather, and also the time when many varieties of fruit are getting close to picking, when it's more important than ever that they get enough water, to make sure the fruit achieves its maximum potential size. Here's a few tips and suggestions that might make things easier:

SOAKER HOSES

These are hoses that simply attach to your taps or the end of your garden hose. They have small holes at regular intervals, or are designed so that water seeps out along their length. They have several drawbacks,

Dig a moat around your tree to pool water

including wasting water by watering parts of the garden that don't have plants, clogging up easily, and not working very well on slopes, but it's relatively cheap, and can be good enough to get you through a season before you install a more permanent irrigation system.

TREE WATERING STAKES

These are pipes that deliver water deep to the roots. You can buy various commercial versions, but it's easy to make your own by cutting off a length of PVC pipe about 5–10 cm diameter, and inserting it so the lower end delivers water to the tree's root zone.

You may need to dig a hole to find out where that is, but most of a mature fruit tree's roots are 30–60 cm below the surface—a younger tree's roots will be closer to the

AT A GLANCE...

The ideal watering system is one that is low maintenance, delivers water slowly, and once set up, requires very little input from you—hopefully just turning a tap on and off! Unfortunately, most of us have to deal with much different systems to this, that might involve soaker hose, a handheld hose, or even buckets. If you don't have a whiz bang automated watering system, this month we give you a few tips that might make your watering a bit easier!



surface. Then just fill the pipe and allow the water to soak in. This is not the most ideal permanent watering system, but it will certainly do the job for one season before it needs adjusting or replacing.

It's easy to figure out how many litres of water the pipe holds at once, which will help you figure out how often you need to fill it.

CREATE A MOAT AROUND EACH TREE

If you're hand watering with a bucket or hose, create a moat around the base of the tree, which you can then fill and allow the water to soak in. A note of caution with this technique: in heavy rainfall periods, you may need to break the wall of the moat to allow the water to drain away.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Don't use a garden sprinkler or overhead sprinkler to water your fruit trees. Anything that keeps the foliage or fruit wet for any length of time is a disease time-bomb, creating the perfect conditions for outbreaks of fungal diseases.

Don't overwater your fruit trees —if irrigation water soaks the soil and then moves below the root zone, it can take precious nutrients away from the roots of your trees. Overwatering also creates the perfect conditions for root fungal diseases to flourish.

Don't underwater, particularly in the 6–8 weeks before your fruit is ready to harvest. Actually, this is a more minor crime than overwatering, and your fruit tree will probably not suffer much damage as long as it's getting enough water to stay alive, but you'll be sacrificing fruit size and quality, and also the tree might not put on much new shoot growth, which means you're also sacrificing next year's fruit buds.



Tree watering stake



Soaker hoses



GROW YOUR OWN FRUIT TREES BY “BUDDING”...

BUDDING IS THE TYPE OF GRAFTING DONE IN SUMMER, AND IS A CHEAP AND EASY WAY TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THE FRUIT TREES YOU ALREADY HAVE IN YOUR GARDEN, WITHOUT HAVING TO BUY A NEW TREE.

Do you grow a variety of fruit that no-one in the family likes? Maybe it flowers but doesn't produce fruit due to lack of pollination? Or do you have a grafted fruit tree that died back to the graft union, but the rootstock is still alive? These are just some of the reasons you might use “budding” to change varieties.

Budding is the type of grafting we



do in late summer, while the trees are growing (as opposed to winter grafting when the trees are dormant). It's very simple – as the name suggests, the graft consists of just one bud being inserted under the bark of the host tree. You then cut back to the bud during winter (we'll talk you through this in winter), and in spring the new bud will start growing, and a tree is reborn!

Budding is also a great chance to try again if you tried grafting last winter and some of the grafts failed to 'take'. In commercial nurseries, peach and nectarine trees are usually produced by budding, as they don't take well to grafting in winter.

You'll need a sharp knife, ideally with curved tip (see photo), as it makes cutting the correct shape a bit easier, but any nice sharp pocket knife (or even a Stanley knife) will do. You'll also need some tape to tie and

seal the graft—you can buy 'budding tape' which is stretchy without being sticky, and suits the purpose perfectly. If you can't get budding tape, it's always worth improvising with something similar (e.g., cling wrap), as you have nothing to lose if it doesn't work!

First collect a piece of wood (called the “scion”) from the new variety you want to grow. Choose a piece of fresh, new season's growth that is ideally at least 20 cm long and about as thick as a pencil. It's easy to pick the new growth—just start at the end of any growing tip (it will usually have greenish or light brown bark).

If you don't have the variety you want to graft already growing at your

AT A GLANCE...

- Budding can be used to
- convert an existing fruit tree to a new variety,
 - fix pollination problems by adding a pollinising branch to a tree,
 - create a multigraft (or 'fruit salad') tree,
 - 'fix' a grafted tree that has died back to the rootstock, or
 - convert a seedling that has come up in the compost pile or garden into a proper variety.

It's very simple. A single bud is taken from the new variety, inserted under the bark of the host tree, and tied up to keep it clean and safe while the two pieces of wood grow together.

In winter the old variety is cut off back to the bud, then next spring the new bud will start to grow, and voilà! you have successfully changed the variety of your fruit tree!

WHY GRAFT FRUIT TREES?

Fruit trees that grow from seed (or pop up randomly in the vegie patch or compost pile) are not 'true to type', which means they won't produce the same type of fruit as the parent (though it may be similar). Because most fruit is produced by pollination from a different variety, it is a genetic mix of the two parents.

Sometimes this is not a problem and the fruit on the seedling fruit tree is edible—but sadly, this is often not the case and the fruit may be either inedible (e.g., cherries and many apples), or just not very appetising (plums are often in this category). Peaches and nectarines from seedling trees are often edible (particularly from self-fertile varieties), but may be unreliable—what a waste of garden space!

Grafting a known variety onto the seedling rootstock makes sure the fruit that grows on the tree will be of a known type, and therefore edible, reliable, and delicious!

Importantly, grafting preserves heritage varieties through the ages—if not for grafting, we wouldn't still have Jonathan apples dating from the 1800s!

1. Make a 'T-shaped cut in the bark



place, find someone who has the variety you're seeking and ask if you can have a piece of wood.

As soon as you've cut the piece of scion wood, use your secateurs or knife to remove all the leaves, just leaving a short piece of leaf stem behind. Each leaf site is a bud you can use. If you're collecting wood from someone else's tree, wrap it in a damp cloth until you get it home and use it. Aim to use it as soon as possible after you collect the wood (the same day is ideal), but if that's not possible, keep the wood cool and damp until it's used.

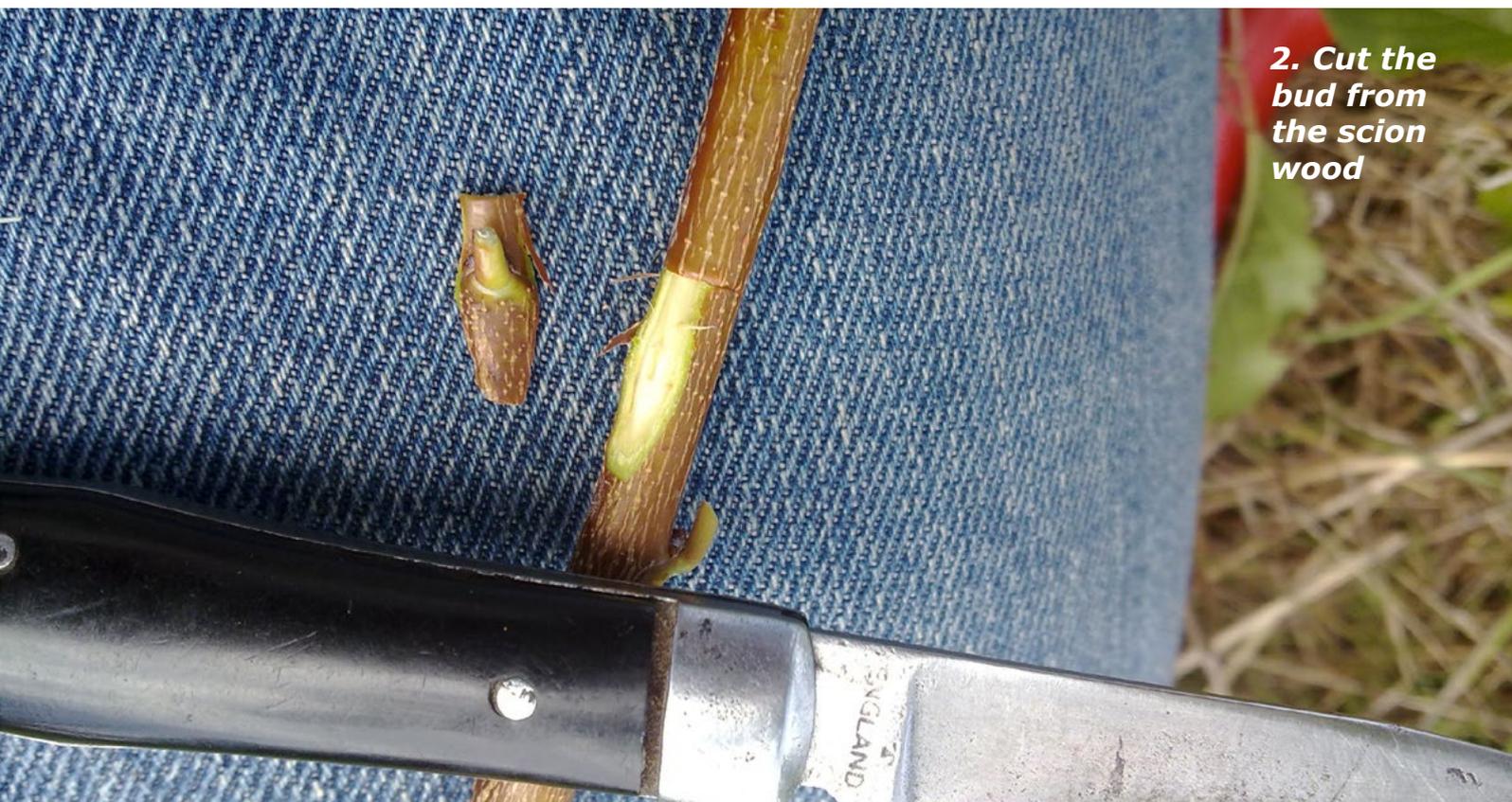
Next, choose the site on the rootstock or old tree where you will place the new bud—wherever you place the bud, that's where the branch of your new tree will start, so aim for about knee height above the ground. Budding works best on shoots smaller than about 3 cm diameter.

In our example, we're budding a grafted tree that was planted in the orchard, but later died back to the graft. Luckily the rootstock didn't die, but put up a nice strong shoot that is now about 2 cm in diameter.

On a smooth part of the bark, use your sharp knife to make a "T"-shaped cut through the bark (see photo 1).

To cut the bud that is to be inserted into the T-cut, hold the scion wood upside down (opposite to the way it was growing on the tree). Select a healthy looking bud and make a straight cut through the bark about 5 mm beneath the bud, then slice from above the bud, gently underneath it, until you meet the straight cut you made earlier. The bud should come neatly off the piece of wood and be roughly shaped like a fingernail (photo 2). Hold the bud so the straight edge is uppermost (use

2. Cut the bud from the scion wood



the remaining leaf stalk as a handle), and gently slide it into the T-shaped cut on the rootstock. The straight edge on the bud should line up neatly with the straight edge at the top of your T-cut, and the leaf stalk should poke between the two bits of bark that were separated by the vertical part of the T-cut. Make sure the bud is sitting flat on the wood beneath the bark. Because you held the scion wood upside down when you cut the bud, it should now be facing the right way up (pointing the same way as when it originally grew on its tree) (photo 3).

Finally, use budding tape to bandage and seal the T-cut both above and below the bud, without covering the bud itself (photo 4).

The bud will not begin growing until next spring, so don't expect anything to happen for a while, but don't worry, we'll let you know when it's time to check it again.

Remember to make a note in your

3. Insert bud into the T-cut



4. Wrap the T-cut

Fruit Tree Diary about which trees you budded, and what variety you grafted on (it can also be interesting to note where the scion wood came from, particularly for the next generation that will be looking after your fruit trees.) Also, label the tree!

When can you start? As soon as the bark lifts easily. How long have you got to finish the budding? Until the bark stops lifting easily away from the wood underneath when you cut it with a sharp knife

CHECKING WINTER GRAFTS

If you did some grafting last winter, it's time to check them again. You will probably have removed the tape around the grafts by now (if not, do it now!), and it's important to remove any shoots that are growing from the rootstock below the graft, as they will compete with your graft and can very quickly take over. Usually you can rub these shoots off with your fingers, but if they've grown too big, you may need to use your secateurs to prune them back flat to the trunk. Don't leave a stub, or the dormant buds at the base of the stub will just grow again.

Budding success!

FIVE KEY STEPS TO ORGANIC PEST AND DISEASE CONTROL

AT A GLANCE...

Healthy trees are less prone to attacks by pests and diseases, and prevention is usually easier (and often more effective) than the cure!

No matter how big or small your orchard or garden, there are five main strategies for keeping your tree healthy and preventing pest and disease outbreaks:

1 . PLANNING: Only grow as much fruit as you can realistically manage or share, keep trees at a manageable size, plan what to do if you're expecting a glut of fruit so the fruit is not left to rot in or under the tree and, if fruit fly is a problem in your area, consider earlier fruiting varieties.

2 . SOIL: Trees that grow in healthy soil will be more naturally pest and disease resistant, so to make your soil healthy add organic matter; encourage microbes, maintain ground cover (either plants or mulch); use compost, worm castings, or seaweed as fertilizer; and avoid chemicals and artificial fertilisers.

3 . BIODIVERSITY: No matter what pest you have, there is usually a predator that will eat it (e.g., ants, beetles, spiders, predatory wasps, hoverflies, lizards, and birds). Encourage the predators by growing a wide variety of plants, especially plants with yellow and white flowers, as predators are often attracted to them.

4 . HYGIENE: Clean up fallen fruit and dispose of it (cook, share, compost, feed to animals); pick damaged or diseased fruit and destroy; and mulch, burn, or bury diseased prunings.

5 . MAINTENANCE: Trees that are properly looked after are usually healthier. Keep up to date with watering, feeding, and pruning your trees to make sure they don't get stressed.

Some pests will attack regardless of how healthy your trees are, particularly birds, Queensland Fruit Fly, Codling moth, and fruit bats, and these pests need specific prevention techniques to target their weak spots and prevent them damaging our trees and fruit.



Trees that grow in healthy soil will be more naturally pest and disease resistant



Always clean up fallen fruit and dispose of it.

SUMMER PRUNING APRICOTS AND CHERRIES...

PRUNING IS ONE OF THE MOST COMMON BUGBEARS FOR HOME FRUIT GROWERS. THIS WEEK WE'VE MADE IT SIMPLE, WITH SOME EASY GUIDELINES FOR SUMMER PRUNING.

Before we get into the details of pruning apricot and cherry trees, let's review the 10 Key Pruning Principles:

1. **REMOVE DEAD AND DISEASED WOOD:** Good orchard hygiene is your second-best defense against disease in your fruit trees (healthy soil is your best defense!), so the first rule of pruning is to remove all dead wood, and as much diseased wood from the tree as possible (without removing too much healthy wood in the process).
2. **PRUNE AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN THE RIGHT SHAPE, FOR YOUR SITUATION:** light pruning encourages fruit production.
3. **WINTER PRUNING ENCOURAGES VIGOUR:** the harder a tree is pruned in winter, the stronger it will grow in spring, unless disease is a factor.

Cut long spindly laterals back to a shoot close to the trunk

4. **SUMMER PRUNING SLOWS THE TREE'S GROWTH DOWN:** apart from pruning apricots and cherries for disease control, summer pruning can also be used to remove strong spring growth without encouraging too much growth.
5. **HEADING CUTS CREATE BRANCHING:** any cut that removes an apical bud on the end of a branch or shoot will cause the two or three buds below the pruning cut to start growing (i.e. create new branches).
6. **SAP FLOWS MOST STRONGLY TO THE HIGHEST PART OF THE TREE:** the strongest growth will therefore usually occur at the top of the tree.
7. **HORIZONTAL WOOD PRODUCES MORE FRUIT THAN VERTICAL WOOD:** horizontal shoots growing from main limbs are the main fruiting wood.
8. **ENCOURAGE FRUIT TO GROW CLOSE TO THE TRUNK** and main limbs, not on long hangers.
9. **PRUNE YOUNG TREES WHEN YOU PLANT THEM,** while they are dormant, regardless of the variety

AT A GLANCE...

We reckon it's a good idea to prune all deciduous fruit trees each year, but you may hear advice to the contrary. Let's check out the pros and cons:

Pruning pros...

- creates a strong shape to suit location;
- keeps fruit growing where you can reach it;
- keeps tree at the right height;
- improves air circulation and sunlight
- encourages tree to grow new wood and fruit buds
- much easier to net

Pruning cons...

- creates smaller trees (despite the illusion created by new growth)
- delays fruiting (the tree grows wood instead of fruit)
- time and effort involved

Apricots and cherries should be pruned in late summer or early autumn to reduce the chance of introducing disease into the tree.

10. **REMOVE SUCKERS WHEN PRUNING:** suckers growing from the rootstock will usually grow more strongly than the variety above the graft, and can quickly take over and dominate a tree.





The first rule of pruning is to remove all dead wood, and as much diseased wood as possible from the tree

This article is mainly about mature trees--if you have young trees (say less than 3 years old), stick to the guidelines in the "Simple Pruning Guide" you got when you joined Grow Great Fruit, or download another copy [here](#).

It's best to prune cherry, apricot, and almond trees in summer, because they are prone to dieback and gummosis (apricots in particular), and pruning when the weather is hot and dry helps the cuts to dry out and heal naturally, and prevents disease getting hold. Ideally, prune in late summer in warm dry weather when the forecast is fine for at least a week ahead.

APRICOTS

Apricot trees produce their fruit on 1 year old wood and on semipermanent spurs. Apricots are very prone to blossom blight and gummosis, so there's a good chance your tree will have some wood that has died back--so wherever you're making pruning cuts, make sure you cut back to healthy green wood.

Each growing season, last year's growth extends, and fruit buds form on the new wood (which we call laterals). One of the main jobs when doing summer pruning is to pay attention to each of these laterals and decide whether it should be (a) left alone, (b) shortened, or (c) removed. Let's look at each of these in turn.

On apricot trees, laterals will continue to grow new wood each season and bear fruit for many years. If they are healthy, not too long and have new growth, just leave them alone.

However, if laterals are getting long and spindly, option (b) is best. You'll usually grow better quality fruit on laterals that are shorter and closer to the main limb and not flapping about in the breeze. Plus, you're

encouraging next year's new growth to grow close to the main limb, rather than allowing the lateral to get longer and longer - this is called 'renewing' the lateral.

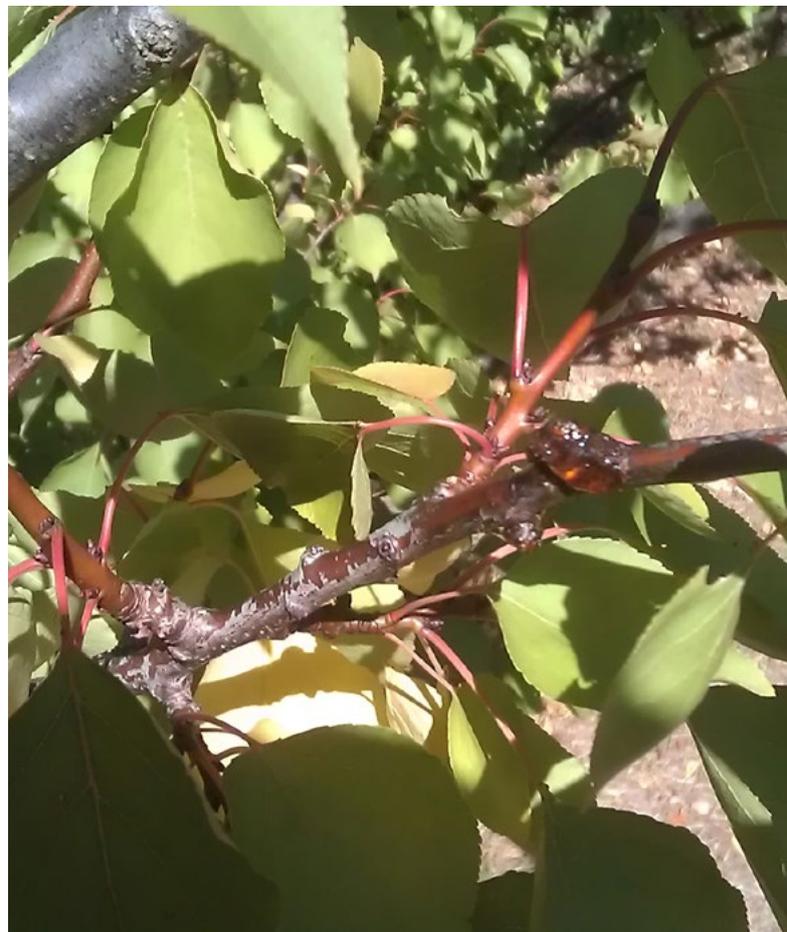
How do you shorten laterals? If they've put out new small side-branches, choose one that as close to the main trunk as possible and cut back to that. However, if there are no side shoots to cut back to, another option is to shorten a lateral back to three or four buds. However, make sure you're cutting into one-year old growth - if a lateral has been allowed to extend from the tip for several years, the new season's growth will only be the bit at the end. If you

shorten a lateral by cutting right back into wood that is two years old or older, there's a good chance the lateral will die.

Sometimes the better option is to remove an old lateral altogether, but this should only be done if there is a replacement nearby. An ugly, over-long or spindly lateral that is still bearing fruit is better than a bare patch on the limb with no laterals and no fruit at all.

Apricot spurs are productive for about 3 years, and need constant renewing, which is why apricots need heavy pruning.

Remove gummosis when summer pruning apricots



CHERRIES

Cherries produce fruit at the base of 1 year old wood, and also on 2 year old and older wood. They bear most fruit buds on short shoots or laterals, with some on long shoots. In cherries, fruit spurs can be productive for 10–12 years, which is why cherries don't need heavy pruning to replace them.

As with apricots, the first job is to remove any wood that has died back as a result of disease or misadventure; other than that, cherries usually only need very light pruning.

If the tree is getting too tall to easily reach, reduce the height of branches. To do this without creating branching at the top of the tree, choose a healthy lateral that is at the right height, and shorten the limb by removing everything above that lateral. That way the apical bud at the end of the chosen lateral will become the new dominant bud for the limb, which should help to prevent branching.

SUMMER PRUNING OTHER FRUIT TREES

Summer pruning to remove strong leafy shoots or shady branches during the growing season is also often done in commercial apple, pear, plum, peach, and nectarine orchards—but for home gardeners it's not usually worth the extra effort! It can have benefits, such as

1. reducing shading and improving fruit colour;
2. encouraging fruitfulness in the following year by improving flower bud development; and
3. reducing growth in overvigorous trees by reducing the number of photosynthesising leaves.

Unlike winter pruning, pruning in summer leads to a more 'settled' tree because it's less likely to make the tree respond with lots of vegetative growth.

The downside of summer pruning is that it can reduce fruit size and sugar levels and suppress late-season trunk and root growth, and, depending on your climate, it can also create problems with sunburn.

A lateral that is several years old, and was shortened last year. It's covered with fruit buds and still producing new wood. No need to do anything to this one.

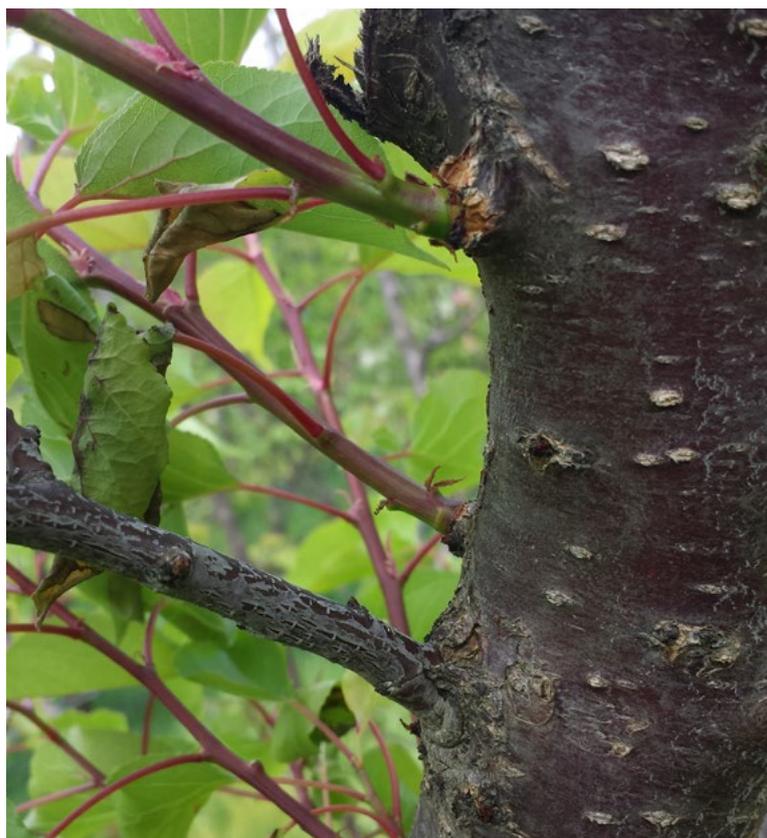


PRUNING TECHNIQUE

1. Use clean, sharp equipment and sharpen regularly.
2. Pruning cuts should be clean, sharp and neat, and on a slight angle.
3. Make each cut about 2 mm above a bud that is facing the outside of the tree—don't leave stubs any longer than this, as they die back.
4. Larger cuts are made easier if you gently push the wood away from your blade, at the same time as you are making the cut.
5. For maximum power in your cut, the back of your hand should be closest to the tree.

Good. Now practice!

Plenty of new laterals have grown from the main limb this year, providing the opportunity to replace some old laterals past their use-by date.



SPOTLIGHT ON BROWN ROT

ABOUT:

Brown rot is caused by the *Monilinia fructicola* and *M. laxa* fungus, which are commonly found wherever stone fruit is grown, so it's pretty unavoidable! It's most commonly found on apricots, peaches and nectarines, but might also be seen on cherries and plums. There are also other types of rot in fruit caused by different pathogens.

LIFE CYCLE:

The infection starts in spring if flowers get infected (when it's called Blossom blight—more on that later in the year). This leads to flowers rotting on the tree, which will reduce fruit set. From there the disease often extends back into flower twigs which will die back.

This earlier spring infection may still be visible as dried looking flowers that have persisted on the tree, or blobs of gum. Fruit trees are very good at isolating the infection by producing gum to prevent the infection spreading further back into the wood—this is why brown rot fits into the broad category of factors that cause 'gummosis'.

In summer, Brown rot infections usually start as small lesions on fruit that can quickly develop into large patches of brown rot, covered with obvious grey spores, particularly in wet seasons. It can quickly spread from one piece of fruit to another in the tree.

The spores survive through winter on infected shoots, and on any fruit that was infected in summer—which will have either fallen off the tree, or shrivelled and stuck in the tree. These are called 'mummies' and are basically a spore 'bomb', just waiting to release their load of new infective spores as soon as they are splashed by rain in spring. Wind can also release the spores.

AT A GLANCE...

Brown rot is one of the most destructive fungal diseases of stone fruit trees, but can be kept under control with good hygiene practices.

At this time of year it's very important to make sure there is no fruit left in your peach or nectarine trees after harvest.



A severe case of brown rot



Dispose of any fruit 'mummies' left in stone fruit trees.

SYMPTOMS:

Fruit develops small, brown, rotten spots on the tree, particularly after rain. The spots rapidly expand and can quickly consume the whole fruit, leading to shrivelled, rotten fruit, often with obvious grey fungal spores all over them. The infection can (and often does) also develop in the fruit post-harvest, particularly if it's not stored at cold temperatures.

MONITORING:

From mid-season on, check trees regularly and remove any diseased fruit (including from under the tree) to prevent the disease from spreading to uninfected fruit or nearby trees.

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT:

Fungicides are preventive, not eradicated - they must be applied to uninjured fruit before the infection has appeared; they won't stop the disease spreading once a piece of fruit is infected. Therefore, when there is fruit on the tree and wet weather is forecast, use a preventive organic fungicide such as sulphur. A disease outbreak can occur after 5 hours of rain when the temperature is more than 20°C. Other preventive measures include:

- Remove any diseased fruit from the tree or the ground under the tree and dispose of it, including any 'mummies' or dried fruit you find when pruning.
- Prune out any dead or diseased wood when you do your winter pruning (even if you don't get time to do any other pruning, this is a really important job to help prevent disease next year). It's worth taking the time to cut out even small twigs that are obviously infected, as they are all covered with spores.
- Rather than waste the nutrients in the diseased wood and fruit, it's great to return them to the soil, but it has to be 'cleansed' first, either by putting it through a hot compost pile, giving it to worms (they'll even eat the wood if it's chopped up small enough), or giving the fruit to chooks or some other animals that can process it.
- Applying organic fungicides at the right time in spring (to prevent blossom blight) and in summer (to prevent brown rot)—don't worry, we'll give you plenty of warning!
- Netting can create slightly more humid conditions and favour the disease, so don't put your drape netting over trees until the danger period for Blossom blight has passed (i.e. after flowering has finished).
- To help trees dry quickly after rain, prune into an open shape, keep understorey plants short, and choose windy spots for vulnerable trees.



Brown rot from a blossom spreading to new fruit



Pick up and dispose of rotten fruit

WHAT IS HEALTHY SOIL?

FRUIT TREES GET THEIR NUTRITION FROM THE SOIL; TO KEEP YOUR TREES HEALTHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO IMPROVE THE SOIL AND STICK TO NATURAL SOURCES OF NUTRITION.

No matter what soil type you have, creating healthy soil for your fruit trees and other plants to thrive in always comes back to the same basics.

PHYSICAL COMPONENTS OF SOIL

Sand, silt and clay are the basic building blocks of your soil, will be present in varying percentages depending on your soil type, and there's not much you can do about it! The good news is, no matter whether your soil has too much sand, or too much clay, the remedy is the same, and we'll get to that in a minute!

MINERALS

Your fruit trees need a range of macro and micro nutrients for growth, including calcium, nitrogen, boron and a whole lot more. Occasionally your soil might be short of one or more and you'll need to add them, but usually they are already present, though often not in a form your fruit

trees can use. Relax though, if you follow our guidelines for creating healthy soil, they'll be regularly topped up, and converted to a form that makes them accessible to your fruit trees.

ORGANIC MATTER AND MICROBES

These two factors are KEY to having healthy plants, and producing healthy food. Having healthy soil relies on having lots of organic matter in the soil, and a healthy population of critters such as worms, and also 'good' microbes like fungi and bacteria that help to deliver nutrients directly to the tree's roots. The worst thing you can do to your fruit trees in summer is have bare ground under them—water evaporates too quickly, the soil bakes, and the life under the soil disappears very quickly as conditions become uncomfortable.

So it's important to keep the ground covered at all times, either with plants, compost, or mulch. Plant

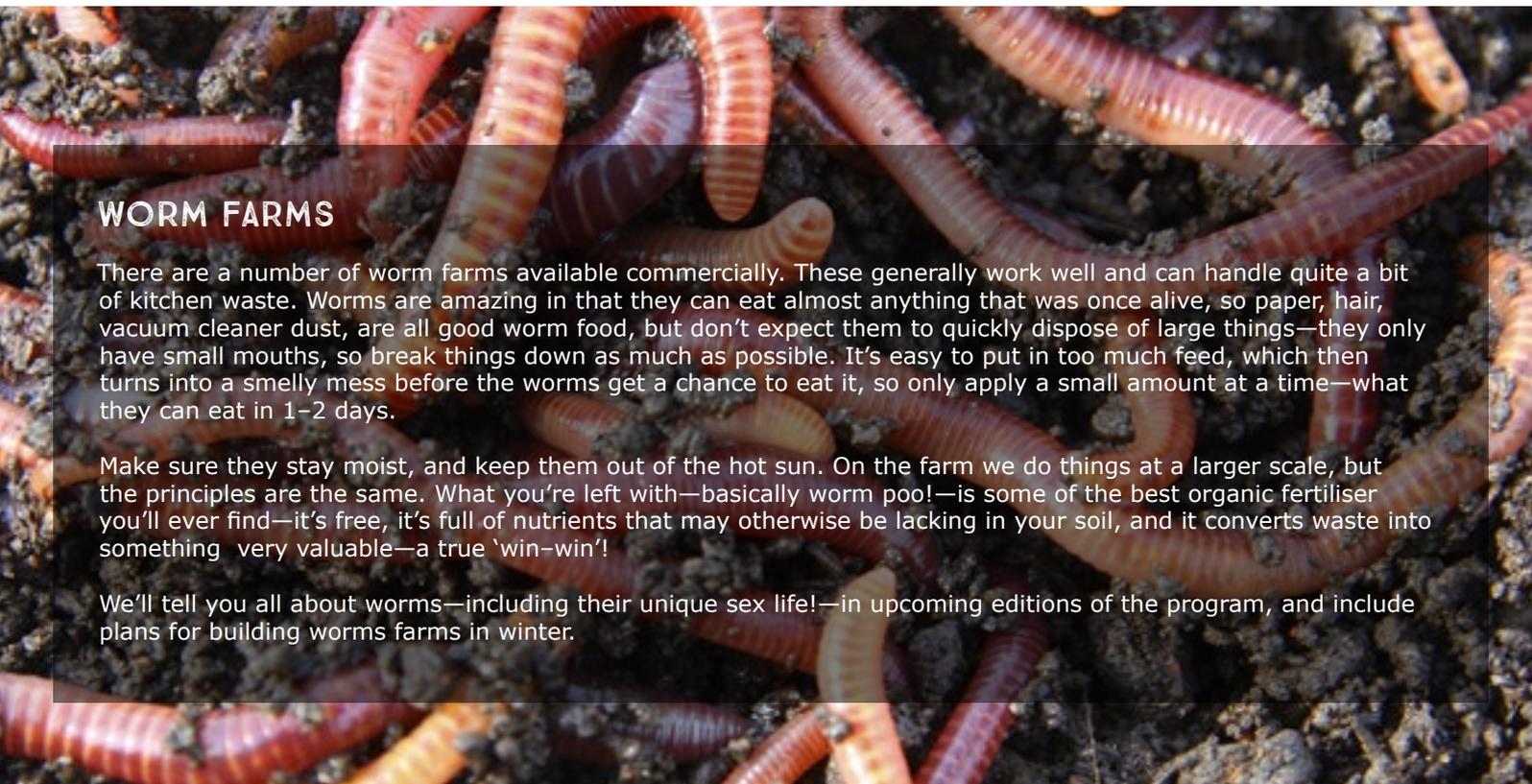
AT A GLANCE...

Fruit trees get their nutrition from the soil. Healthy soil needs to be a happy home for 'good' critters—worms are the biggest and most obvious, but there's thousands of living things in every teaspoon of soil.

Healthy soil needs ground cover, such as mulch, so it doesn't dry out or bake. 'Living' mulch such as ground covers or herbs are even better, but should be kept low or be mowed regularly.

To keep your trees healthy it's important to improve the soil and stick to natural sources of nutrition. Worm castings (poo!) are fantastic and it's easy to set up a worm farm at home. Compost is also great, and home-made compost turns scraps and waste into a valuable resource—and it's free!

cover can either be weeds (yes really, weeds are much better than bare soil) or plants you've chosen, like herbs or small shrubs. It is a good idea to keep these plants short, either with the help of some animals—depending on the size of your garden this might be a sheep, a goat, chickens, or rabbits in a hutch that get moved around regularly—or if you're not into animals, by mowing. There are several good reasons for doing this:



WORM FARMS

There are a number of worm farms available commercially. These generally work well and can handle quite a bit of kitchen waste. Worms are amazing in that they can eat almost anything that was once alive, so paper, hair, vacuum cleaner dust, are all good worm food, but don't expect them to quickly dispose of large things—they only have small mouths, so break things down as much as possible. It's easy to put in too much feed, which then turns into a smelly mess before the worms get a chance to eat it, so only apply a small amount at a time—what they can eat in 1–2 days.

Make sure they stay moist, and keep them out of the hot sun. On the farm we do things at a larger scale, but the principles are the same. What you're left with—basically worm poo!—is some of the best organic fertiliser you'll ever find—it's free, it's full of nutrients that may otherwise be lacking in your soil, and it converts waste into something very valuable—a true 'win-win'!

We'll tell you all about worms—including their unique sex life!—in upcoming editions of the program, and include plans for building worms farms in winter.

- reduce competition for water,
- maintain good air flow around the tree,
- reduce habitat for crawling pests like earwigs and also snakes,
- make it comfortable to pick fruit or work around your tree,
- increase the amount of carbon the plants extract from the air (as carbon dioxide [CO₂]) and put into the soil (as humates), which is not only great for your fruit trees, but also doing the planet a favour!

A word of caution: at this time of year it's best to avoid giving your fruit trees too much nitrogen, as it can make fruit overly soft and reduce the flavour, so steer clear of nitrogen-rich sources of nutrition such as fresh chicken manure under your trees.

BOOSTING MICROBES WITH COMPOST EXTRACT OR COMPOST TEA

Making your own compost extract or compost tea and applying it regularly throughout the season helps to keep the soil populated with the 'good' microbes that are so important to keeping your soil—and fruit trees—healthy. But why make extract or tea? The simple answer is that they are



Testing whether your soil will form balls that hold their shape is a good test of your soil structure.

good ways to make a small amount of compost go a long way. We make 800 litre tea brews from just 5 kg of compost or worm castings, and this is enough to give all our orchard blocks (5 hectares) a good solid dose. You can do it at home in small batches with just 500 gm of compost or worm castings.

So, what's the difference between tea and extract? You'd be right for being unsure of this as there's a fair bit of confusion around it.

COMPOST EXTRACT

Soaking compost (not manure) in

a bucket of water and swishing it around is **compost extract**. It's a useful product as the humates (the stuff that makes the water go brown) get washed off into the water, as do the microbes and fungi. The result is basically liquid compost—it's easy to apply, plants and soil love it, and there's no such thing as too much. The big plus of making compost extract is that it's dead simple—all you really need is some compost, a bucket, and a bit of water, and nothing can really go wrong. As with anything, if you start with good ingredients you'll end up with a good and useful product.

Checking your soil profile is worthwhile and gives some insight into what your growing conditions will be like.

Dig a hole about 60 cm deep if possible, and wide enough that you can see the different layers down the side wall of the hole. Look for colour changes.

The topsoil is usually dark because (hopefully) it contains humus and organic matter. The deeper this layer is, the better your soil and the easier it will be to grow trees.

You'll then move into one or more layers of lighter subsoil, and then finally into clay and possibly bedrock.



COMPOST TEA

Compost tea differs in that you are actually growing microbes—it's a science experiment in a bucket! Doing this multiplies by many times the number of microbes in the original compost or castings, resulting in a concentrated brew of literally billions of microscopic organisms, all ready to do their good work on your soil!

Compost tea is more complicated than making extract because to grow these little fellas you need not only good source material (compost or worm castings), but you need to look after 'em—compost tea requires food and air to be successful.

On the simplest level, a 20-litre bucket with a large aquarium air pump and some hose will get you started. The most important thing is that the water is highly aerated—it should be bubbling vigorously, like a pot of boiling water. If you're using chlorinated tap water, aerate it for about 30 minutes before adding anything so the chlorine can de-gas.

So, we've got our bucket and air pump set up, our water is tumbling nicely, and the chlorine has gone. The compost can then be added, and it can just go in loose if you don't mind straining the tea at the end, or are simply putting it out by the bucket or hose. It's important that the compost is allowed to move and get tumbled by the water so that the microbes are knocked off into the water and can then breed easily.

Ok, microbe food next. Put simply, trees prefer tea that has high fungal levels, and vegetables and annuals prefer tea with high bacteria levels. In practice it doesn't matter too much. Good bacterial foods include molasses and other simple sugars; fungal foods are more complex, so oatmeal, bran, liquid fish (e.g., Charlie Carp), and liquid seaweed (e.g., Seasol).

For a 20-litre bucket, a cup of compost is enough (really!), and then about 100 ml each of any additives. The tea is then brewed for 24–36 hours—if the air temperature is colder than about 20°C during the day then brew for longer; warmer air means faster brews. If the air is lower than about 12°C then probably don't bother until things get warmer—there simply won't be enough going on to make it worthwhile.

Don't be alarmed if your brew starts foaming at some stage during the process. This is simply a sign of microbial activity, and so is good in that way, but from the point of view of what you're brewing, it's neither good nor bad.

So, how do you know if what you've brewed is a plant and soil smorgasbord teeming with life, or is just brown

water? Basically, if it smells bad (e.g., 'off' smells, or sulphurous) it probably is, and so don't put it on your plants or soil. Having said that, properly brewed compost tea does have a distinctive smell; it's certainly not a bad smell, but it's not that good either (something like a cross between wet dog and horse poo!), so don't be too hasty in getting rid of it.

The important thing to remember here is that neither compost extract nor compost tea is a fertiliser—they are really soil improvers by building up the microbe population. So, while they are important for building long-term soil health, you might also want to give your trees a boost with a complete organic fertiliser.

DO I ALSO NEED FERTILISER?

As most gardens don't have perfect soil (yet!), it's also a great idea to give your trees a feed with a natural form of nutrition, to make sure they have all the nutrients they need.

If you have a worm farm, then a sprinkle of worm castings or worm juice is perfect because it's nutrient rich; if not, then you can either buy some compost at your local garden supplies outlet (buy the best compost you can afford), or a commercial natural fertiliser based on seaweed, a terrific quick form of fertiliser (but, as with any commercial formulation, use in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations—more is not necessarily better!).

If you can't get hold of good quality compost, or you're not sure of its quality, a handy tip is to buy the compost in advance, put it in a pile, and inoculate the pile by pouring on some high-quality nutrition and microbe food, e.g., some compost tea or extract, liquid manure, worm castings or worm juice. Leave it for at least a few weeks before you use it, and it's more likely to give your soil a super-boost of all the things it needs—nutrients, organic matter and microbes—all in one application.



Worm castings are a fantastic source of both organic matter and microbes. They're also great source material for compost tea.



A 20-litre bucket, air pump, and some PVC fittings make a very useful home-scale compost tea brewer. (We give full instructions in the program in July; send us an [email](#) if you'd like them now.)

PICKING, CARE, AND STORAGE OF PLUMS...

There are two main types of plums – European (*Prunus domestica*), and Japanese plums (mostly *P. salicina*). European are the more traditional type of plum, and tend to have a softer, juicier texture. Some varieties also need to be handled more gently, as they are more easily bruised. Some of the common European varieties include Angelina, Greengage, Coe's Golden Drop, President, and Prune plums.

Japanese plums tend to have a firmer texture, and to hold their shape better, even when they are ripe (though many will go soft when they get really ripe). Some common Japanese varieties include Satsuma, Pizzazz, Frontier, Santa Rosa, Donsworth, Black Amber, Mariposa, Amber Jewel, Angeleno, and Autumn Giant.

Plums usually have a waxy 'bloom', or a dusty whitish layer on the skin. This is the plum's natural waxy defence layer, which contains wild yeasts and other microorganisms. Along with the high sugar content of plums, this bloom is one of the reasons plums are prized in many European cultures for their ability to easily ferment and make various versions of plum alcohol.



HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOUR PLUMS ARE RIPE?

As with all deciduous fruit, plums need to reach maturity before they can ripen—this happens when they've accumulated enough starch to let it ripen, and can only happen on the tree. As the starch turns to sugar the fruit ripens, and once started, this can finish after picking, though the flavour is always better if it happens on the tree.

COLOUR

Most fruits have two components to their colour—the main skin colour, and a background colour underneath the main colour. While the main skin colour can tell you whether the fruit has reached maturity, it doesn't always tell you if it's ripe! The background colour starts off green for all fruit, and then as the fruit ripens it gradually becomes white or cream (for white flesh fruit), yellow (for yellow flesh fruit including plums), or red (for blood plums).

Some plums get an all over skin colour that makes it difficult to see the background colour, and for these plums (e.g., Satsuma), you'll need to rely on taste to decide when to pick. Other plums do show a background colour (e.g., Amber Jewel, Autumn Giant), which will change from green to yellow when the fruit is ripe.



AT A GLANCE...

Plums are a wonderful, resilient fruit, that can usually handle rougher treatment, and will be more likely to ripen off the tree if picked too early, than many other fruit.

Having said that, it's still worth trying to get the picking times right, and handling your fruit gently, to get the very best result!

They're also more resistant to most pests and diseases, and less likely to be attacked by birds. And on top of that, they're delicious! We love plums!

TASTE

This is the easiest way to tell whether plums are ripe. If they taste ready, they usually are! However, a word of caution—it's surprisingly easy to get excited about your plums being ripe before they are at their peak, because many of them get quite sweet early in their ripening phase. Amber Jewel, for example, start out quite sweet, but the flavour keeps getting sweeter and richer for the next two weeks or more if they're left on the tree!

FEEL

Don't rely on how your plums feel to decide when to pick them, as many of them stay very firm even when they are well and truly ripe enough to pick, particularly Japanese plums. Conversely, if you wait until your



European plums (e.g., Angelina or Greengage) are soft before you pick them, they may be overripe within a few days of coming off the tree.

FRUIT DROPPING

As with most fruit, waiting until some fruit fall on the ground from ripeness is a great way to tell if a tree is ready to start picking, but you do need to be cautious. It's really important to treat each variety of plum separately, because they have quite different characteristics. Some plums, such as Greengage, go from being underripe to all being on the ground within a few short days. Others, like Satsuma, ripen more slowly and it's worth waiting until you're sure they're completely ripe.

SIZE

While it's not as dramatic as with peaches and nectarines, many plums will increase in size in the last few days of their ripening phase, and can gain up to 50% more size and weight in this time. It's always worth picking a tree several times, just taking the ripe fruit each time, and it's quite possible to extend the picking time of some varieties over at least a couple of weeks. During that time, the fruit that is left behind will get a greater share of the tree's resources, and will often noticeably increase in size.

PICKING TECHNIQUE FOR PLUMS

Pick in the coolest part of the day—you should never pick hot fruit if you

can avoid it!

It doesn't matter whether you plums with their stems or not, as they'll usually fall off later.

As with all fruit, make sure you don't bruise them with your fingertips as you pick; luckily, they are less likely to bruise than apricots, peaches or nectarines, but if you're picking them ripe it's still possible to damage them by being too rough.

Once picked, place rather than drop the plums into the picking container—remember, you should never be able to hear your fruit when you're picking!

Plums can be picked into any container, it's quite ok to stack them on top of each other as you're picking.

As each container is filled, put it in the shade—fruit should never be placed in direct sunlight once it's off the tree.

Once you've finished picking, cool the fruit as quickly as possible, either in a fridge, or in the coolest place in your house.

STORING PLUMS

Fruit will keep better, and for longer, if its temperature is reduced as quickly as possible after picking. To slow the ripening process, it also helps to store the fruit at a low temperature—if there's room in the fridge, that's perfect, but a cool room or cellar can provide good enough conditions to keep fruit for a few weeks at least.

If you're planning to store your plums for any length of time, sort them before you store them, and remove any with broken skin. Damaged fruit ripens much faster and is prone to developing brown rot or other post-harvest diseases, and shouldn't be stored with whole, healthy fruit. Use the damaged ones first.



WOULD YOU LOVE TO EAT ORGANIC PLUMS ALL YEAR?

Plums are a wonderful fruit for preserving because they lend themselves to such a wide variety of methods: bottling, brandied, jam, dried, fruit leather, pickled, chutney, frozen, or plum wine. Fruit preserving will always cause some loss of nutrient but, depending on the method used, it may still have a higher nutrient content than raw, as raw fruit rapidly loses nutrients after it is picked and is exposed to air.

BOTTLING (CANNING)

If bottling very ripe fruit, plums can be bottled in water, however due to their usually tart skins, you might find the end result a bit sour. A light syrup (1 part water: 4 parts sugar) will usually suffice. For a more interesting result, add cinnamon, star anise or cloves to the syrup, but be sparing, as a small amount of spice can have a dramatic effect on the end result.

FREEZING

Fruit loses less nutrient through freezing than it does through heating (for example when it is bottled), however freezing has other drawbacks—it uses a lot more energy in the long run so it's both more expensive and worse for the environment.

DRYING

One of the most nutritious and delicious ways of preserving plums is to dry them. If they are dried slowly at a low temperature below about 49°C they retain most of their vitamin and nutrient content, and make a lovely sweet treat packed full of chewy goodness—perfect for school or work lunches.

JAMS AND JELLIES

Plums are perfect for jams and jellies, either as the star attraction, or as a 'filler' to make the most of small quantities of more exotic or rare fruits, particularly berries. Plum goes well with raspberry, blackberry or blueberry. Plums have a relatively high level of pectin (particularly if you include some green fruit), so you can borrow plum's excellent setting qualities for some of the harder to set fruit like strawberries. There are so many different plum varieties, each with their different flavours and characteristics, that it is always worth making 'varietal' plum jams. Greengage plums, for example, make a stunning jam that is unique in flavour and more similar to apricot jam than traditional plum jam. Many of the varieties that are not so good for eating (e.g. Damson, and many types of cherry plum) make excellent jam and are definitely worth the extra work of getting rid of the many small pips. (HINT: lightly stew the fruit first, then remove the pips by hand or with a mouli, then proceed with the jam recipe.)

CHUTNEYS AND RELISHES

Plum is an excellent base for chutney and relish recipes, and combine well with almost all other types of fruits and vegetables. Watch out for upcoming recipes in the Grow Great Fruit program, or seek out historical cookbooks in second-hand stores for some traditional recipes.



PLANNING YOUR HOME ORCHARD...

DO YOUR FRUIT TREES WORK FOR YOU? WITH A BIT OF THOUGHT AND DESIGN, YOUR HOME ORCHARD CAN BETTER MEET YOUR NEEDS.... ONCE YOU KNOW WHAT THEY ARE!

With good planning and design, in a temperate climate you can have fresh deciduous fruit in your garden from late spring to early winter. Picking fruit at the right time, and storing it properly, can extend the fresh fruit season by another couple of months, and then preserved fruit can fill the gap until the new season starts.

Fruit trees are a powerhouse for converting the sun's energy into vitamins and nutrients that our bodies can use as fuel and medicine. They can also provide other stuff that might be useful:

- wood from prunings can be used as firewood, mulch, landscaping material, or to build a swale to catch topsoil that might otherwise wash down a hill,
- leaves can be used in compost or to feed animals,
- excess fruit makes great animal food or compost.

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM YOUR FRUIT TREES?

This week, take a few moments to make some notes about each of your

fruit trees. If you haven't already, print the [Fruit Tree Diary](#) for each fruit tree in your garden (provided when you joined the Grow Great Fruit program). In the space provided to make notes, jot down a couple of points:

WHAT YOU LIKE ABOUT EACH TREE:

- It's in a great position.
- I can see it out the window when I do the dishes.
- It always has heaps of fruit.
- The blossom is beautiful.
- The kids like to climb it.
- It attracts birds to the garden.
- It grows fruit without me doing much work.
- It's the type of apricot Nanna used to grow in her garden.
- ...or whatever it is that you love about this tree (if there is anything!).

WHAT DOESN'T WORK FOR YOU ABOUT THIS TREE:

- It flowers but doesn't bear fruit.
- It looks sick and I don't know why.
- It takes too much water/time/pruning.
- It's a seedling that hasn't produced

AT A GLANCE...

Summer is a great chance to notice whether your fruit trees are meeting your needs...maybe you want to produce a year's supply of fruit for your family, provide shade for the kids' play area, screen the yard from the neighbours, or ensure a plentiful supply of those apples you adored as a kid.

A lot of the work of planting trees, changing varieties, etc. is done in winter, but the planning starts now—it makes sense to grow the right trees in the right place, and the best varieties in appropriate quantities, to suit your family!

fruit yet.

- Nobody eats the fruit from that tree.
- I put a lot of work into the tree, but don't get much/any fruit
- It drops fruit where I walk around the yard.
- I can't easily reach the fruit or prune because the tree's too big.
- It attracts birds to the garden that eat all the fruit!
- ...and whatever else doesn't work about this tree!

Next, when you have a little time, take a few moments to answer the questions in the [Fruit Tree Garden Planner](#) you received when you joined



Trees in pots can be a good solution if space is limited

the Grow Great Fruit Program. This will help guide you as to how many fruit trees you want in your garden.

You'll be starting to build a picture of how well your fruit trees are meeting your needs, and then you can start planning any changes you want to make.

We know that lots of home fruit growers want to grow as much of their own fruit as possible in their own garden. If you've filled out the Fruit Tree Garden Planner, you'll know how many fruit trees you'd ideally like in your garden—let's look at some ways of achieving that!

IMPROVING EXISTING FRUIT TREES

If you've already got any fruit trees thriving in your garden, that's a bonus, even if they're not exactly what you want. You'll get the biggest reward, in the shortest time, by improving those trees first. So let's check out some ways of improving the situation...

Grafting and budding	Can be used either to change variety, or add more varieties to the same tree. For example, if you have a glut of peaches from a single tree, you can graft on some different varieties which ripen at different times.
Adding a polliniser	This can help a lightly bearing tree produce more fruit. For example, a lone apple tree will often produce more fruit if you add another variety of apple. This can be done either by planting another tree, or by grafting another variety onto the existing tree (make sure you choose the right variety to pollinise your existing tree).
Improving the soil	Regularly adding good compost can often improve the soil to the point that a tree that has previously not thrived will suddenly start growing and producing fruit.
Moving the tree	Young trees and small trees can be moved in winter while they are dormant.
Diagnosing and treating pests and diseases	Careful observation (and the help we'll give you!) can help to diagnose any problems a tree might have. With proper prevention and treatment, a tree will often recover fully and produce healthy crops of fruit.
Netting	This is the only guaranteed way to prevent birds eating your fruit.
Pruning	Pruning can change the shape of your tree to better suit your garden. For example, you can reduce the size to make it easier to pick and manage, create a bushier tree that will screen a view, or train a tree along a wall to make use of vertical space. Correctly pruning each variety can also improve fruitfulness.
Removing the tree	As a last resort, very sick trees, or trees in the wrong place, are best removed completely.



ADDING NEW FRUIT TREES TO YOUR GARDEN

You might want to add more trees to your garden—but can you fit them in? If you have a small space, you may need to consider some creative options:

- dwarf trees;
- trees in pots;
- espalier or other training methods to make use of vertical and horizontal space, such as growing trees along walls or fences.

If you can't fit as many trees as you would like, you can still grow a number of different varieties by using multigrafted trees. Many fruit trees can have as many as four (or more) different varieties on the same tree. This is a great way to spread your harvest over a longer period.

You can either buy your trees at a nursery (we'll cover what to look for in a nursery tree in a coming edition) or grow your own, which is cheaper and much more fun. We'll explain the whole process of growing your own trees, step by step, in coming weeks.

USING GUILDS TO GROW HEALTHY TREES

One of the useful concepts in growing a healthy and productive garden is that of a guild, or a collection of plants and animals designed to work together for their mutual benefit. It's sort of like taking companion planting one step further...

Guilds are commonly used as a design element in permaculture gardens. Permaculture stands for "permanent agriculture", and is a fantastic way of planning gardening, farming and food production systems that was created by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s.

In his seminal book *Permaculture: A Designer's Manual*, Bill Mollison describes guilds as "a harmonious assembly of species clustered around a central element (plant or animal)." In our case, the central element would probably be a fruit tree! The design then focuses on choosing other plants that will provide benefit to the tree and to each other, and animals are often included.

Guilds have layers of plants that grow to different heights, so a perfect fruit tree guild might have an apple tree as the tallest layer, some mid-layer bushy plants (e.g., globe artichoke, comfrey, borage, lavender, vetch, horehound, nasturtium or rhubarb), and some groundcover plants (including clover, alpine strawberries, barrel medic, rocket, plantain and a variety of other common weeds).

The sorts of animals that may be included in this type of guild might include:

- Chickens (or other poultry) may be introduced at some times of the year to disturb the soil, clean up pests and fallen fruit, and deposit some manure
- Rabbits or guinea pigs can live permanently in a guild, or be moved in at different times of the year
- Native birds, insects and lizards, for example, that are likely to be attracted to guilds due to the intense

biodiversity found in this type of planting.

Though at times it's easy to notice the damage these animals can do, they also bring a lot of benefits in terms of adding to the biodiversity, controlling pest insects, and depositing organic matter.

Other benefits you can expect to see from mixing species up in your garden (ie, creating biodiversity) include:

- improved carbon storage, organic matter, and diverse microbial life in the soil, and therefore the provision of free nutrition for your trees;
- improved water penetration and storage in the soil, and better pollination;
- better pest and disease control; and
- more food for your family!

If damage from animals is an issue, the best way to approach it is to consider how you can protect both your trees and your fruit from damage with specific measures like tree guards, netting or horticultural glue, rather than trying to get rid of the animals.

AT A GLANCE...

Guilds are a collection of plants (and maybe animals) that provide benefits for each other.

Guilds cleverly bring together all elements that we normally consider in ecosystem design including plant form, height, diversity, properties and inter-relationships, as well as the relationships between plants and animals.

They are one of the key design elements we can borrow from permaculture to design the ideal ecosystem to give our fruit trees everything they need - right at their feet!



WANT TO DESIGN A GUILD FOR YOUR FRUIT TREES? WE PROVIDE ALL THE RESOURCES YOU NEED....

In designing a guild, it's useful to draw on a range of different design and scientific tools, for example:

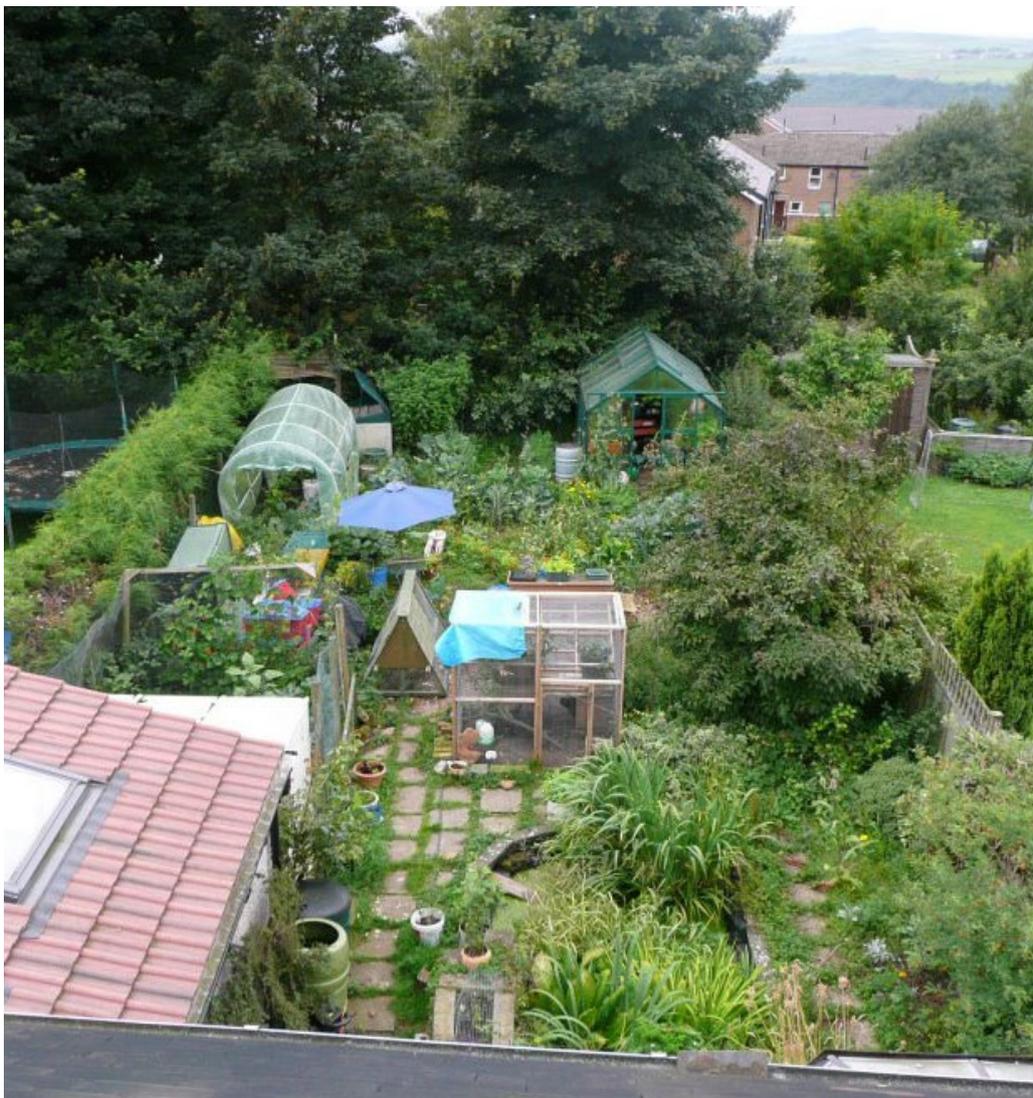
- the science of allelopathy (which we'll cover in detail in Spring), which describes the chemical effect of one plant on the growth of another—usually inhibiting, but occasionally promoting, growth. Care should be taken not to include plants in a guild that might have a negative allelopathic effect on the fruit tree, such as eucalyptus, black walnut, or tall fescue.
- On the other hand, it's a good idea to include plants that have a positive effective such as hairy vetch, which provides nitrogen for the fruit tree at the same time as inhibiting other less useful weeds. Other grasses such as rye, oats or barley also inhibit lots of weeds.
- During winter we'll bring you two lists of plants to draw on in designing your guild—green manures, and living mulch plants. These are plants that help to enrich soil by providing lots of bulk (organic matter), as well as specific nutrients (like nitrogen) for the plants. Lots of plants in this list will also provide other benefits to your fruit trees including attracting beneficial insects to help with pest and disease control, and pollination.
- It's also worth checking out the list of dynamic accumulators that we'll also be focussing on in spring. These are plants which 'mine' the soil for specific minerals and nutrients, making them available to other plants.

Good luck with your guild design!



A plant and animal guild

Plant guilds add greatly to biodiversity in the garden



ABOUT US

We—Katie and Hugh Finlay—run Grow Great Fruit from our farm in central Victoria, Australia. Teaching organic fruit growing was a natural progression from growing fruit commercially for years, and being asked thousands of fruit tree questions as we were selling fruit at markets.

We've always used organic, biological and regenerative farming methods, relying on building healthy soil to grow healthy trees and fruit—so that's what we teach. The trees get their nutrients from a diversity of microbes in the soil and plant tissues and from their relationships with other plants, rather than from artificial fertilisers.

We've been orchardists since 1998, both coming to it from non-farming careers, though Katie grew up on the orchard and Hugh worked on farms in Western Australia and the Middle East before roaming the globe for many years as a travel writer for Lonely Planet.

Training in organic farming, permaculture, soil biology, compost and holistic farming (as well as years of practical, hands-on experience) has all been important in developing our growing practices, the sustainable development of the farm, the establishment of the Harcourt Organic Farming Co-op, and the ethics of what we bring to you in Grow Great Fruit.

Diverse plantings rather than monoculture, spreading risk with biodiversity, and learning how to grow your own food successfully all contribute to food security—and we're on a mission to help build a secure food future for all!

DISCLAIMER: We make every effort to ensure the information given in this program is accurate. However, as conditions and methods vary, we cannot guarantee the results, and take no responsibility for any damage or injury that may occur, no matter how caused. But relax—you'll probably grow twice as much fruit as we predict...without incident!

Staying in touch

Part of what we love about the Grow Great Fruit Program is that we're building a community of like-minded fruit growers—something we wish we'd had when we were learning how to grow fruit.

There's lots of ways to join in, ask questions, share information, swap stories, make connections, and get to know us, and other GGF members.

On the socials...

See daily photos and updates from the farm, post comments, and share your own news on our social platforms:

Visit our [Facebook](#) page.



Instagram: [GrowGreatFruit](#)



For our exclusive community...

Grow Great Fruit Forum: Post your photos and questions online to get answers and feedback about fruit growing issues. Also a great place to brag about your success! Click [here](#).

Monthly Q&A Sessions: Join the community for a face-to-face friendly group chat once a month. Bring your questions and send photos in beforehand for us to share with the group. Register from the Members Home Page [here](#).

Blog. Our blog is another way we share what's happening on the farm, and go into more detail about various aspects of organic fruit-growing. Click [here](#) to view the blog.

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