Pruning

If you keep fruit trees the time has come to begin the 2021 growing season! That’s right, it’s time to prune.

We have begun pruning at our demonstration orchard at the SW Colorado Research Center and the weather has been cooperating wonderfully.

This is the ideal time to prune as the trees are still dormant but are getting ready to wake up. Pruning during dormancy keeps the tree stress to a minimum.

As I write this article our snowpack is holding steady, therefore we have to drag our tools around on a sled due to deep snow drifts. Our progress is good so far but wee will need to keep up on it to finish before our trees break dormancy.

On March 11th, starting at 6pm virtually via Zoom, the Dolores and Montezuma County Extension offices will be conducting its annual FRUIT TREE PRUNING WORKSHOP.

There will be no charge for the workshop. For more information please contact the Extension Office at 677-2283.

To keep up with traditions for this column, the following is the pruning article from Dan Fernandez, Retired Dolores County Extension Director.

There is no way I could write this any better so here is it.

When the weather finally warms up you may want to consider getting a head start on your fruit tree pruning, especially if you have a lot of trees to prune. If you only have a few trees (1-20) then waiting until March won’t hurt. The following are some tips on pruning.

Basics of pruning

a. It’s personal, and must be customized to your location

b. You want to promote tree development to your management scheme

c. Tree symmetry, support and strength are critical factors

d. Reducing the effects of shading is essential

e. The Goal is early and consistent fruit production

When to Prune

a. Pruning starts the first season the tree is planted - but only lightly.

Pruning intensifies as the tree ages

b. Pruning can begin in January, but March would be the best time for our area. Your

start date really depends on how many trees there are to prune

c. Pruning must be completed before bud swell or bloom

d. Summer corrective pruning is advisable

e. Do not prune after August 1st

f. Do not prune early-to-mid winter as healing will not occur

Pruning equipment

a. Sterilize all equipment before and during use especially if diseases are present

b. Hand saws, pruners, loppers and air powered equipment are acceptable

c. Use chain saws only as last resort

d. Keep all equipment sharp and clean

e. Use only 3 point orchard ladders

Tree shape & Size

a. For apples, pears and cherries\* a central leader or modified central leader system works

well; think of the shape of a Christmas tree

b. Peaches and cherries\* require an open center with 2 to 4 main scaffold limbs

c. Tree size is determined by what you feel you can manage; a 10 to 12 foot tree is a

relatively large tree

d. For all trees, limb angles should be between 40 to 60 degrees to promote good fruit

development, managed growth and limb strength

\*Note – Cherries can use both training systems

How much do I prune?

a. It’s personal depending on your management scheme and desired pruning system

b. First, step back and look at the tree. Then walk around the tree and start

pruning slowly

c. Remove dead, broken or diseased branches

d. Remove congested or crossing branches and twigs

e. Use heading cuts to promote side branching

f. Remove all root suckers and water sprouts

g. Heavy pruning can reduce fruit production, but enhance fruit size

h. Old tree rejuvenation requires significant corrective pruning with subsequent reduction

in production likely for 2 to 4 seasons

*Information provided by CSUCE and Dolores County.*

For further information concerning these topics or any other subject, stop in or call Gus, Oma and Joey at the Colorado State University Dolores County Extension Office, 677-2283. Cooperative Extension programs are available to all without discrimination.