

Notes from the Heritage Winter Fruit Pruning Workshop

1st March 2015

The workshop was led by Kate Robinson – Community Garden Coordinator, Jam Yesterday Jam Tomorrow. It was very well attended, with approximately 30 ploholders present. We started with the apple and pear trees on Bob Trevillion's plot and then, after a coffee break, we went to look at the soft fruit on Jenny Bourne's plot.

Apple & Pear trees

The Ideal shape to aim for is a goblet, leaving space at the centre for light and air to penetrate. The textbook shape will have 8 main branches.

Every year you should cut out:

- anything in the centre or growing towards the centre
- dead, diseased or damaged wood
- any branches that are crossing against another branch as they will rub and cause damage
- little twiggy shoots at the base

Cut just above a bud. Leave only a very short stub as this is where die-back and disease set in.

Current thinking is that you don't need to cut on an angle, although Kate still prefers to do so. Current thinking also holds that you don't need to treat the 'wounds' with tar or Vaseline etc. Just leave the tree to heal itself.

Cut off any shoots that are going straight upwards. Trees fruit better on more horizontal branches so the vertical ones are a waste of the tree's energy.

Regular pruning should all be done during the dormant season (Jan / Feb / early March) although you can take off some shoots during the summer too.

If the tree is basically a single stem (ie. you can't aim for a goblet shape), just tidy up the spurs, take out dead, damaged or diseased wood and any crossing branches.

If you are renovating an overgrown tree, don't do it all at once. Do a third each year for three years. In 'renewal pruning' you leave a mix of spurs and last year's growth. You'll be able to see which fruits better ie. whether the tree is tip bearing or spur bearing.

If you cut a tree, particularly an apple tree, back very hard you may get 'hedgehog growth' the following year. This is lots of vertical shoots with a lot of leaf growth but little fruit. Cut some out in the summer.

The ground around the base of the tree should be kept clear for the first 3 – 4 years. Mulch this area but don't place the mulch right up against the tree trunk. After that it's OK to let grass grow up to the tree but don't let it get too overgrown.

Redcurrants, whitecurrants and gooseberries

Again, the ideal shape to aim for is a goblet, formed of 8 – 10 main branches forming a goblet on top of a short stem.

As for fruit tree pruning, aim to keep the centre of the goblet clear, and also cut out dead, diseased or damaged stems.

Trim the tips back – about a third of the last year's growth. Redcurrants and whitecurrants – trip back to just above an **outward facing** bud. Gooseberries – trim back to just above an **upward facing** bud.

Take out vertical shoots – you want branches more horizontally angled. Also take out skinny twigs / whips sprouting from the base.

Where you have a nice new branch, on an angle rather than straight up, you can take out an adjacent old one.

Most pruning should be done in winter but you can take the tips of new growth back to about four leaves during the summer, prior to fruiting, to encourage the energy to go into the fruit.

Blackcurrants

Aim for 8 to 10 main branches per bush. The principle is to cut a third of the stems right back to the ground each year.

The fruit comes on 2nd year wood. Aim not to have anything older than 3 or 4 years. You should be able to tell the new growth from the previous year's – look for a join in the bark.

Ideally don't let them fruit in their first year – rub out the buds.

Raspberries

Autumn fruiting raspberries – in February take everything right down to ground level.

Summer-fruiting raspberries – after fruiting, cut down to the ground any stems that have borne fruit this year and leave the new growth (which won't have fruited). That is what will fruit next year.