Apple Tree Pruning
Elizabeth Garofalo
and Jon Clément
UMass Amherst

Fruiting habit - APPLE
- Apple fruits on two year old and older wood
- Flower buds develop on spurs (short shoots) on two year old and older wood
- Best fruit occurs on 2-, 3-, 4-year old wood
- Buds/spurs weaken as they get older
- Shade is your enemy
- Horizontal wood preferred over vertical wood

APPLE – fruiting habit

APPLE pruning – goals
- Create a balance between fruiting wood and new shoot growth (which will become fruiting wood)
- Remove old wood, stimulate new growth
- Create an even light environment (as possible) throughout tree
- Open up tree for spraying, etc.
- Create a structure to support crop load
APPLE pruning – basics

• Central leader tree
• Cone shape tree
• Dormant pruning (January-April) more invigorating than summer pruning (July)
• Heading cuts increase vigorous response at location of cut
• Thinning cuts are more desirable because they create balance between new and older wood
• !!!Thinning cuts are almost always preferable to heading cuts!!!
Early June

Remove competitors

Early Bending
• Distributes vigor
• Develops good crotch angles
• Timing: early June
Young Apple Trees

- Almost no pruning is required
- Maintain dominance of central trunk
  - Remove direct competitors
  - Apply 2-to-1 Rule
- Remove bad crotch angles
- Timing:
  Spring through early summer
Note that a “bevel cut” is used to encourage renewal branches.

Bevel or Dutch cut

Remove bad crotch angles
Bending later in the life of the tree

Timing: April & May
If all branches in a tree are set at the same angle, those at the top of the tree will be the most vigorous.

To maintain an appropriate distribution of vigor, make branches at the bottom more upright than those at the top.
Seven Simple Rules for Apple Pruning
Optimal timing: February-May

1. Remove 2-3 of the largest limbs in the top 2/3’s
2. Use the 2-to-1 rule
3. Avoid stubbing (or heading) cuts
4. Simplify branches
5. Remove drooping branches
6. Remove branches growing straight up
7. Maintain central leader
1. Remove 2-3 of the largest limbs in the top 2/3’s

2. Use 2-to-1 Rule
   Trunk diameter > 2x limb diameter
3. Avoid heading/stubbing cuts

Remove the limb instead.

4. Simplify branches

4. Simplify branches
5. Remove drooping branches

6. Remove upright branches

6. Remove upright branches
7. Maintain the central leader

THIS IS NOT CORRECT!

THIS IS BAD!

EXCESS VIGOR & NO FRUIT!
Pruning Fruit Trees in the Home Orchard

37 photos and illustrations enhance the detailed text covering apple, pear, peach, plum and cherry trees.

To purchase copies of the Pruning Fruit Trees in the Home Orchard, contact your state Extension publication office, or the University of Massachusetts Extension Bookstore at 1-877-MAW001 (within Massachusetts) or 413-540-2111. You may complete your order online, print your confirmation/po and mail it with a check, or submit it electronically through mail. A follow-up phone call will provide credit card information. Check the homepage for hours of business, as they will change.