

# Successful Fruit Trees

## Siting fruit trees.

Growing fruit trees successfully requires an open situation with plenty of light, shelter from prevailing winds and a freely draining soil. Good light ensures good growth and ripening of fruit. Shelter warms the site improving pollination, growth and fruit production.

The ideal soil for fruit trees is a well drained loam that is slightly acid. Avoid sites susceptible to waterlogging.

When selecting the site make allowances for the future growth of the trees. Planting distances between trees should not be too small. Allow for access when the trees have grown and good air circulation. The following distances should serve as a guide for bush trees:

<b>Apples:</b>		
<b>MM106</b>	–	moderately vigorous – 3.6-5.5m (12-18ft)
<b>M9</b>	–	dwarfing – 2.4-3m (8-10ft)
<b>M26</b>	–	semi dwarfing – 3-4.5m (10-15ft)
<b>M25</b>	–	vigorous – 9-12m (30-40ft)

<b>Plums:</b>		
<b>St Julien A</b>	–	moderately vigorous – 3.6-5.5m (12-18ft)
<b>Pixy</b>	–	semi dwarfing – 3-3.6m (10-12ft)
<b>Brompton</b>	–	vigorous – 9-12m (30-40ft)

<b>Pears:</b>		
<b>Quince A</b>	–	moderately vigorous – 3.6-4.5m (12-15ft)
<b>Quince C</b>	–	semi dwarfing 2.5-3.5m (8-12ft)
<b>Pyrus communis</b>	–	(wild pear) – vigorous 9-12m (30-40ft)

<b>Cherries:</b>		
<b>Gisela 5</b>	–	dwarfing – 2.4-3m (8-10ft)
<b>F.12.1</b>	–	vigorous – 9-12m (30-40ft)

## Different styles:

**Espaliers** – Apples & Pears (use M26 or MM106 for apples) – 3-4.5m (10-15ft)

**Fans** – Plums & Cherries – 3-4.5m (10-15ft)

**Cordons** – Apples & Pears (use M26 or MM106) – 60-90cm (2-3ft)

We supply all varieties as one year ‘maidens’. They are ideal for training into different forms. Use the notes in this guide to help develop the style.

## Planting your trees.

We supply bare-root trees from November until March. For your tree to get away to a good start a little preparation is advisable. Dig the planting hole a little larger than the root system. Fork over the bottom of the hole. Back-fill ensuring no air pockets are left between the roots consolidating the soil as you go along. It is best not to improve the soil in the planting hole much so as to encourage rooting into the surrounding soil.

If a stake is required insert it before planting on the windward side. Staking on more exposed sites anchors the roots while they establish and should be considered a temporary measure for two or three years. Use short stakes and tie low down. The stem should be able to move in the wind with the roots held firm. Staking is often not required on very sheltered sites. Trees on dwarfing rootstocks should be permanently staked.

You should aim to plant your tree at the same height as it was planted in the nursery with the graft union clear of soil level. Tie tree to stake. Do not allow the tree's roots to dry out during the planting process. Water if necessary. If rabbits are present use a guard for protection.

During the first season ensure the tree is well watered during dry spells, and remove any weed competition within a diameter of about 1m (3ft). Mulching with organic matter will suppress competition, conserve moisture & feed gradually.

## Training your tree.

The early years of your tree's life should be used to build up a framework. This depends on your aims. Remove any fruit in the first year and for the first five years do not let it over fruit. Let the tree concentrate on vegetative growth.

There are various forms that fruit trees can be grown into depending on space and intentions. In the open, bush trees are usually grown. There is also the spindlebush, where a centre leader is maintained. This is usually grown in commercial orchards. For restricted spaces the usual styles are espaliers and cordons for apples and pears and fans for plums and cherries.

## Bush trees

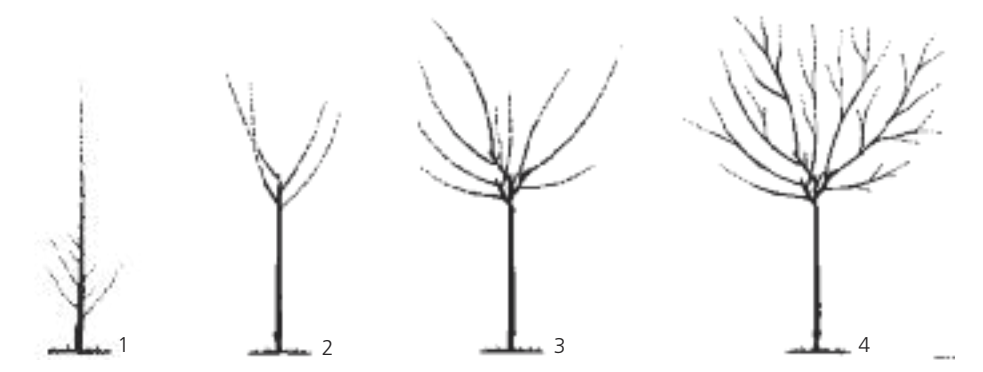
The aim is to produce a goblet shaped tree open in the centre above a clear stem. The height of clear stem varies depending on intentions and vigour of rootstock. The following heights should serve as a guide:

**Dwarf bush** – 45-60cm (18-24") & Bush – 60-75cm (24-30") suitable for trees on dwarfing & semi dwarfing rootstocks.

**Half standard** – 1.35m (4'6") suitable for trees on moderately vigorous rootstocks.

**Standard** – 1.8m (6') suitable for varieties on vigorous rootstocks.

If the tree has not reached the required height allow it to grow for another year.



## Winter year 1 (Diagram 1)

After planting reduce the stem to the height depending on the type of bush tree you are planning to grow. Cut back to just above a bud using a sloping cut away from the top of the bud.

Sometimes and depending on the variety ‘maiden’ trees will have side branches or feathers. Often they will be too low, but sometimes they will be at a nice height and can be made use of. In which case reduce the main stem, retain up to three well spaced feathers reducing them by two thirds and bypass the next paragraph.

## Winter year 2 (Diagram 2)

The following winter choose the best two or three evenly spaced branches, ideally with wide angles to the main stem. Wide angles mean stronger branches. Reduce these primary branches and the leader by half to an outward facing bud and remove the unwanted branches flush with the main stem. During the summer a number of secondary branches or laterals will be produced from the primary branches.

## Winter year 3 (Diagram 3)

Select up to four laterals on each primary. Often less will have grown. Reduce them and extension growth on the primary branch by between half and a third. Cut any branches not required as secondary branches back to four or five buds to encourage fruiting.

## Winter year 4 (Diagram 4)

Reduce extension growth by about a half. What was the leader and were the primary branches may well be becoming indistinguishable. From now on the tree should be bearing fruit and pruning becomes lighter. Remove any growth crowding the centre of the tree where poor quality fruit will be produced.

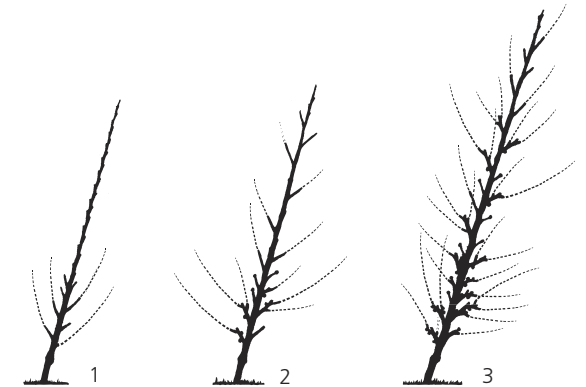
## Pruning times

The above pruning process applies to all fruit trees. However the timings vary. Apples and Pears winter prune as detailed. Prune plums in early spring and summer to guard against silverleaf disease. Cherries should be pruned early spring at bud burst to prevent bacterial canker.

## Cordons

For small gardens, against walls and fences cordons are ideal taking up little space. Each tree becomes a trunk with short side branches on which fruit forms.

Before planting attach lines of wire 30cm apart starting at 60cm above the soil to the wall or fence. Plant ‘maiden’ trees at 45° with the graft union uppermost 60-90cm (2-3ft) apart, about 15cm (6ins) away from the fixed structure to allow for growth, tying them to long canes attached to the horizontal wires.



1. (Diagram 1) After planting reduce any side branches to four buds. In the first summer remove any developing fruits.

2. (Diagram 2) From now on cordons are summer pruned from late July in the south to late August in the north. Reduce any shoots 25cm (9") or longer back to three leaves if arising from the main stem, or one leaf if coming from last summers branching. Shoots less than 25cm at this stage can be reduced in October.

3. (Diagram 3) Pruning in following years follows the same pattern. Once the leader has reached its full height cut it back to a weaker shoot in late spring to discourage regrowth. Allow fruiting to increase gradually as the tree develops.

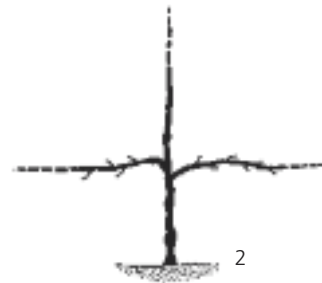
Cordons are suitable for training over arches. Initial growth will be vertical but manage in the same way as as trees planted at an angle.

## Espaliers

Like cordons espaliers are ideal for training. They can also be developed to create a boundary within a garden. Plant 'maiden' trees, they are ideal for training. Plant 3-4.5m (10'-15') apart if more than one is to be grown and about 15cm (6ins) away from any fixed structure.

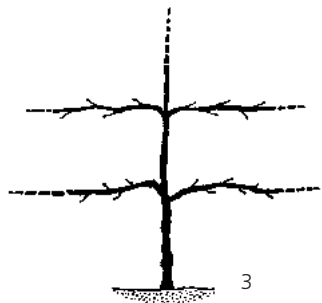


1. (Diagram 1) In the winter of planting a horizontal support wire is attached to the wall or fence about 30-40cm (12-15") above soil level. The tree is cut back to a bud just above the support wire. During the early summer the shoot from the uppermost bud is allowed to continue vertically supported by a cane while those from two opposite buds immediately below are trained in to form the first tier of branches. Any other shoots that have grown are removed.



2. (Diagram 2) In the second winter put in place another horizontal support wire up to 45cm (18ins) above the lower tier and prune the vertical shoot to a bud just above it. Prune back the two horizontals by about a third. The whole process is repeated in the second summer on the second tier.

Generally varieties on semi dwarfing rootstocks are good for two or three tiers. If a moderate vigour rootstock used more tiers may be developed.



3. (Diagram 3) The process is repeated for as many years as the number of tiers required, each winter tipping back each years extension growth by about a third. If after lowering to the horizontal any of the tier shoots grows much weaker than the other raise it to 45° for a period over the summer. Hopefully this will encourage its growth.

Step overs are single tier espaliers and are grown in the same way but without the central upright shoot. They can edge a vegetable plot or be grown next to a path without hindering access or shading other plants. Use a dwarfing rootstock.



4. (Diagram 4) Laterals will develop along each tier. These should be summer pruned like cordons. Allow the tree to fruit gradually, each year allowing more fruits to develop. When horizontal branches have reached their extremity cut back to a lateral.

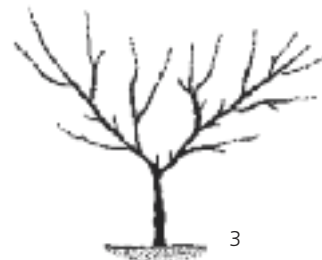
## Fan training

Stone fruit - Plums & Cherries will fruit better if fan trained. Choose a warm south facing location. Prepare the supporting structure using a series of horizontal wires 15cm (6") apart starting off from 30cm (12") The length of the wires depends on the eventual space the fan is to take up.



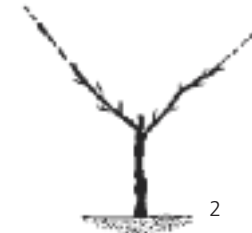
1. (Diagram 1) Plant a 'maiden' tree 15cm (6") from a wall or fence. Plant it to tilt slightly back to the structure behind it. Reduce the tree to 30-45cm (12-18") above soil level with a sloping cut just above a bud. Cut any laterals hard back to a healthy bud.

Early in the first summer select two shoots. Remove any other shoots. Attach the shoots to canes and attach to the wires behind at about 45°. Continue to tie in through the summer.



In June/July in following years as new shoots grow pinch out the growing tips once they have made six or seven leaves. This will help develop the fruiting spurs. In late summer after fruiting cut back these pinched out shoots to three leaves to encourage fruit buds to form for the next year. Any excess outward and inward growth can be cut out.

Remember with stone fruit not to prune during the autumn or winter but in early spring just as the trees are to become active.



2. (Diagram 2) Cut back the two shoots to 30-45cm (12-18") to a bud in early spring. In the second summer select up to four shoots from these pruned back shoots. One to carry along the cane, the others tie in to angled canes evenly spread over either side of the fan.

3. (Diagram 3) In early spring reduce each lateral shoot by a third to a bud. In the third summer allow these shoots to extend. Allow three or four side shoots to grow from each lateral. Tie them in.

In late summer pinch out the tips of the shoots. This will encourage fruiting the following year.

**Walcot**  
ORGANIC NURSERY

Tel: 01905 841587

Walcot Organic Nursery Ltd., Walcot Lane,  
Drakes Broughton, Pershore, Worcs., WR10 2AL

[www.walcotnursery.co.uk](http://www.walcotnursery.co.uk)