

Pruning Orange Trees

Presented by: Jocelyn

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Tools:

Long Handle Loppers

Pruning Saw (handheld or electric)

Bypass pruners

Rubbing Alcohol and Rag (Sterilize all of your pruning tools before any tree is pruned to avoid spreading diseases)

Optional:

Ladder

Pole Pruners or Saw

Tool sharpener

Happy, healthy and productive citrus trees need a balance of 4 major components: sufficient/stable water, soil, airflow and sunlight. If these things are provided and planned for in young citrus trees, the less work you have to do over the course of time. Oranges/Citrus are unlike many other types of fruit that need regular pruning to maintain healthy trees that bear quality fruit. Unfortunately, many citrus trees have been either over-pruned leading to thick-y dense growth and disease or under-pruned, leading to size and disease problems. However, you can rejuvenate an older or out-of-control tree to reduce pest and disease problems and to produce larger citrus fruits through simple pruning and feeding techniques.

Observe the tree and make a plan: Make a thorough inspection of your orange tree to decide what you are going to do. Look for any dead or diseased branches. Check out the lower trunk area for any suckers that may need to be removed. Look over the branches to see if any are crossing over other ones near the middle of the tree. Make a final overall examination of the tree from several different angles. Evaluate individual limbs within the tree's canopy. Any weak or damaged limbs should be removed, as well as any boughs that rub or press against larger limbs. Pruning specific limbs allows you to thin the canopy without compromising the overall crown shape. As a result, the root system below supports a smaller amount of limbs and leaves; extra energy once used to support the removed limbs can now be channeled to create bigger fruit.

Neat Note: With oranges/citrus, you can let the branches grow almost to ground level - leaving about 18-24" of space between the ground and the branches to keep pests and diseases making the jump from the soil to the tree . That can increase the crop of easy to harvest low-growing fruit.

Notes: _____

Timing:

Any pruning, whether severe or minimal, should be performed after main fruit production and prior to the new spring growth spurt - which in this area is mid-late spring. A tree can be tidied during early summer, taking care not to do any rigorous pruning.

Notes: _____

Cutting:

Tearing orange/citrus tree bark renders the tree vulnerable to disease. The best way to create a clean pruning cut for larger limbs is using the three-cut process (see diagram below). The first cut is on the underside of the branch about 15

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inches away from the 'crotch angle' or meeting point to the main branch; saw midway into the branch. Next, saw the branch on the upper side about 18 inches away from the meeting point until the limb falls free. The branch can then be cut farther back by cutting just above the branch collar. Do not cut the stump off flush to the trunk! Damaging the branch collar will the the cut unable to seal and an easily infected wound.

Finally, prune branches to shape the tree. Pruning cuts should be just above a node or another branch (see diagram below).

Notes: _____

Suckers and Water-sprouts

Suckers are fast growing (and often differently shaped) shoots from the rootstock and should be 'rubbed off' or pruned away to keep energy going to the tree. The rootstock is identified a graft union that looks like a large lump or swelling near the base of the trunk. Anything sprouting from the rootstock is unproductive wood, not the actual variety planted, and takes precious energy away from the remainder of the tree. Root suckers should also be removed immediately by digging down as low as possible to find the source and removing it from there. "Water sprouts" – vigorous shoots that grow straight up from branches or trunks, especially after a severe pruning - can be removed at any time and generally do not bear quality fruit.

Notes: _____

Pruning Severity

A canopy that allows light in evenly through the limbs is the best for a healthier, disease resistant tree that bears delicious fruit. Pruning the orange/citrus tree should not leave the silhouette wide open. *As with all pruning, remove up to but no more than one-quarter to one-third of the tree canopy to avoid damaging the tree.* Pruning too harshly will excessively stress the tree, causing dieback or complete tree death. And note that previously shaded bark now exposed to sunlight should be protected to prevent it from becoming sunburned and susceptible to disease and insect damage. Luckily, in this area, we don't have too much intense sun but to protect the bark after a rigorous pruning, mix equal amounts of light or white interior latex paint with water and paint the newly exposed bark. That whitewash won't harm the tree and acts like sunscreen for the bark.

Notes: _____

Resources for IPM of Citrus:

UC Davis IPM online: <http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/selectnewpest.citrus.html>

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