

Helpful reminders of what's needed to grow healthy and productive trees and plants.

MAY 26, 2021

2021 Healthy Growing Reminder #3 – Training Your Trees

If you haven't already, it's time to remove your tree guards for the Summer and train your trees. Good fruit production starts with pruning, but it's also important to train your branches. Horizontal growth promotes side branching and fruit production. Vertical growth promotes more vertical growth with little side branching or fruit and creates problems as the branches get bigger. Proper pruning will prevent a lot of this, but sometimes you have a branch in a good location that you'd rather save than remove.

First, we want to prevent "competing leaders." These are branches that grow near the top, very vertical, and with a narrow crotch angle. If left alone, they will eventually get large enough to split the tree. These branches are easy to correct if identified when young and supple. A clothes pin may be all you need to get them to start to grow more horizontally (see photo above). Ideally, we're looking for at least a 60° angle between the branch and the tree.



Second, we look for lower branches tending to grow vertically. We can use a little bit of weight on these (i.e. one of our customers used little bags of rocks so she could adjust the weight) or we can "tie down" the branch to a lower branch or the trunk. I use a lot of bailing twine or small gauge mechanics wire.



Another option is to use branch spreaders; a piece of wood with a nail in each end or a heavy gauge piece of wire. They are wedged between the trunk and the branch to create the correct angle. Don't worry about the small wound the nail creates. They will "heal" quickly once the spreader is removed. Be very careful, the branch may break if pushed too hard. Don't take a chance. If the branch has gotten too big, it may need to be removed or pruned way back (next Spring) to slow its growth so it can be removed later.

The training device should be removed when the branch no longer springs back when removed. This will likely take about 6 weeks during the growing season.

