



Looking after your orchard

Orchards need looking after, but this doesn't have to be time consuming or difficult. When you plan your orchard, take into account the maintenance – who's going to do it, what time is available. Make it as simple as possible so the kids can be involved, see the enclosed leaflet on the basic requirements. Pruning is essential in order to keep the tree to a manageable size, and to encourage new growth so that the trees produce more fruit. Training your trees is also required if you have decided to use a different growth form to a standard tree.

Some bits of advice:

- Consider removing all fruitlets in the first year or two to support stringer tree growth. This isn't essential, and may mean that some pupils never see the tree fruit, so it's up to you.
- Check tree ties regularly to make sure they don't become too tight. Remove them after years or so when the tree is well established
- Make sure plenty of people in the school know what needs doing to look after the orchard so that it doesn't get neglected if you leave or are away for a length of time.
- Allocate clear responsibilities, or timetable in classes for different jobs so they don't get missed or forgotten. Consider setting up a management group using the eco-committee or a particular class.

Tasks throughout the year

Spring

- Remove any late snow from the branches so they don't get damaged
- Mulch around the trees if the mulch mat starts to disintegrate and weeds start to appear
- Repair or replace rabbit guards on young trees
- Remove caterpillars from young leaves

Summer

- Small fruits will be starting to appear, some will drop off naturally as space runs out, but you may need to remove some to allow 10cm or so between each one to get good sized fruit in autumn
- Water if there are prolonged periods of dry weather

Autumn

- Harvest the fruit as it ripens – give apples a gentle twist, and it will come off if ready. Don't pull hard!
- Storing apples – wrap individually in tissue paper and store in a cool, dry place, like a shed or garage.



Winter

- Now is the main time for pruning apple trees. Remember to clear all tool before starting and between each tree to prevent spreading any pests of diseases.
- Cut out dead, diseased or damaged branches
- Cut out branches growing into the centre – aim for a bowl shape if growing a bush.
- Cut out apple branches growing vertically – these will get too high to reach and can't support fruit as well
- Check tree ties and stakes – they should be supportive but not too tight
- Repair or replace any tree guards
- Mulch trees bases with bark, grass cuttings, leaf mulch etc to preserve moisture and protect from frost.
- Now is the time to add any other trees or bushes. Consider adding currant or gooseberries.

The fruitful schools guidance note on training and pruning has more advice on what to do for specific free forms, including bush, cordons, step-over and espalier.

See fruitful schools growing tips: intro to tree care, training and pruning, pests & diseases, harvesting & storing guidance notes.

Don't forget that there are free training courses are available through Clyde Valley Orchards Group, Clyde and Avon Valley Landscape Partnership, and through Forth Valley Orchards. Keep an eye on their websites for more info (see useful links page).

There are also many online guides to pruning, training and tree maintenance, including some good videos on youtube:

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=90>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/basics/techniques/pruning_prunefruittrees1.shtml

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_jggWXIUHM

http://www.gardenaction.co.uk/fruit_veg_diary/fruit_veg_mini_project_september_2d_apple.asp

