bounty

an orchardist's illustrated guide to a fruitful harvest

contents

Forward 4
January 5
February 6
March 8
April 9
May 10
June 11
July 13
August 15
September 16
October 17
November 18
December 19

bounty

an orchardist's illustrated guide to a fruitful harvest

written by Benjamin Howard and Maria Smilde
illustrated by Maria Smilde

Dear Orchardist, current or prospective:

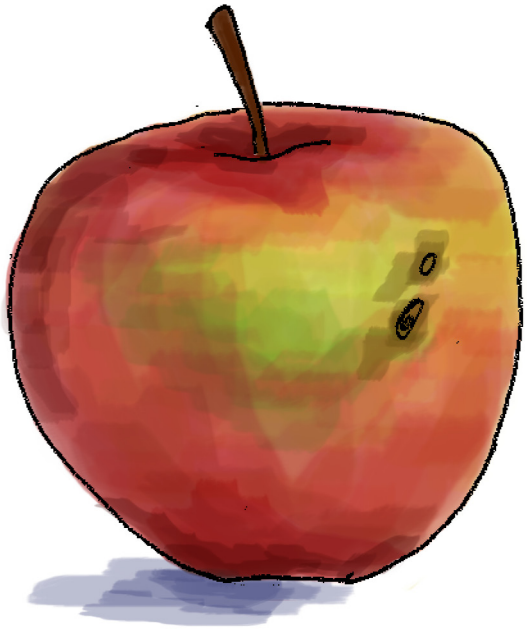
Over at the Baltimore Orchard Project, we aspire to see orchards of all sizes and types crop up around the city of Baltimore. We recognize that we must rely on people like you to be the cultivators and stewards of these places, and we hope to provide as much support as we can to you in this fruitful endeavor.

The sheer volume of information available on the responsibilities and maintenance involved in orchard care is overwhelming and even conflicting at times. This guide is not meant to be a full and exhaustive manual to orcharding, but rather, a collection of our best advice and the essential practices for healthy trees and a bountiful harvest.

Not only have we sifted through the material, but we have organized it and presented it in a manner that you will hopefully find engaging and helpful: a month-by-month illustrated guide to fruit care. (The calendar has been created for Baltimore's climate, and with that in mind, readers elsewhere should adjust accordingly). Our goal with this guide is to encourage, inspire, and involve people like you in a movement towards creating an edible Baltimore.

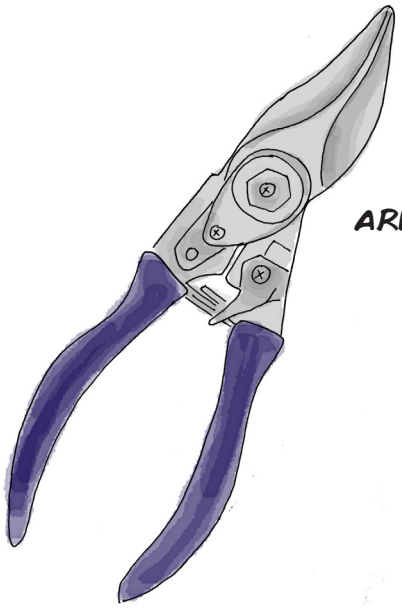
Best wishes to you.

Sincerily,
Maria Smilde & Benjamin Howard



January

Winter pruning season is just around the corner, so now is a good time to make sure all of your tools are in good shape.



Hand Shears
are useful for cutting smaller branches

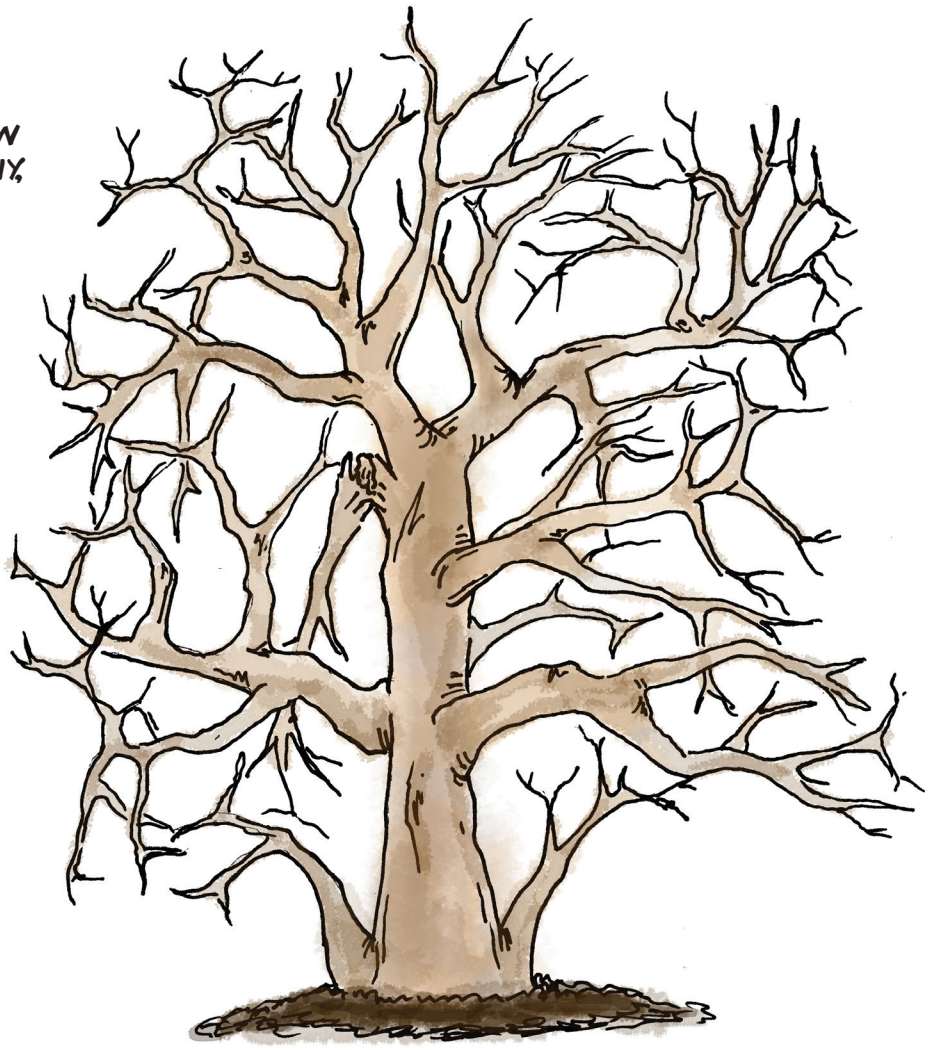
Pruning Loppers
have a long reach and are useful for cutting medium sized branches

Pruning Saws
are necessary for cutting much larger branches.

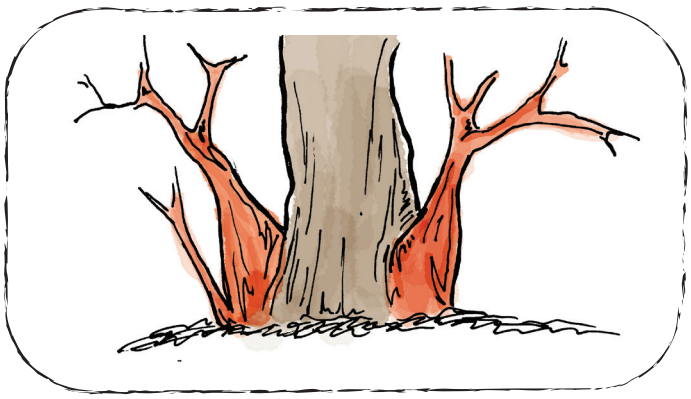
Use a sharpening stone, not a file, to sharpen your tools. Keeping your tools sharp will make pruning easier in addition to making cleaner cuts to allow the tree to heal faster.

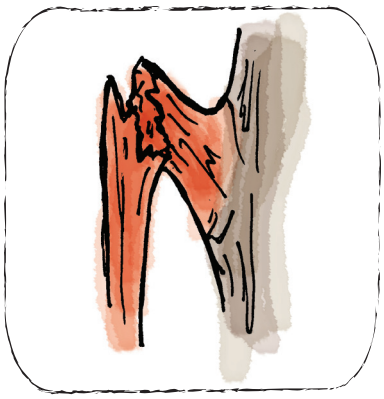
February

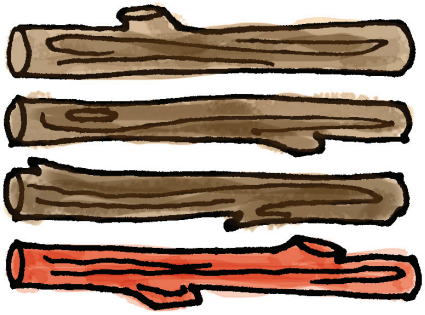
Pruning may seem like an overwhelming task to many – but it doesn't have to be. Here's what you need to know to keep your trees in healthy, fruitful condition.



When pruning, prioritize removing branches that are growing from the ground or bottom of the trunk, as well as any broken or dead branches.





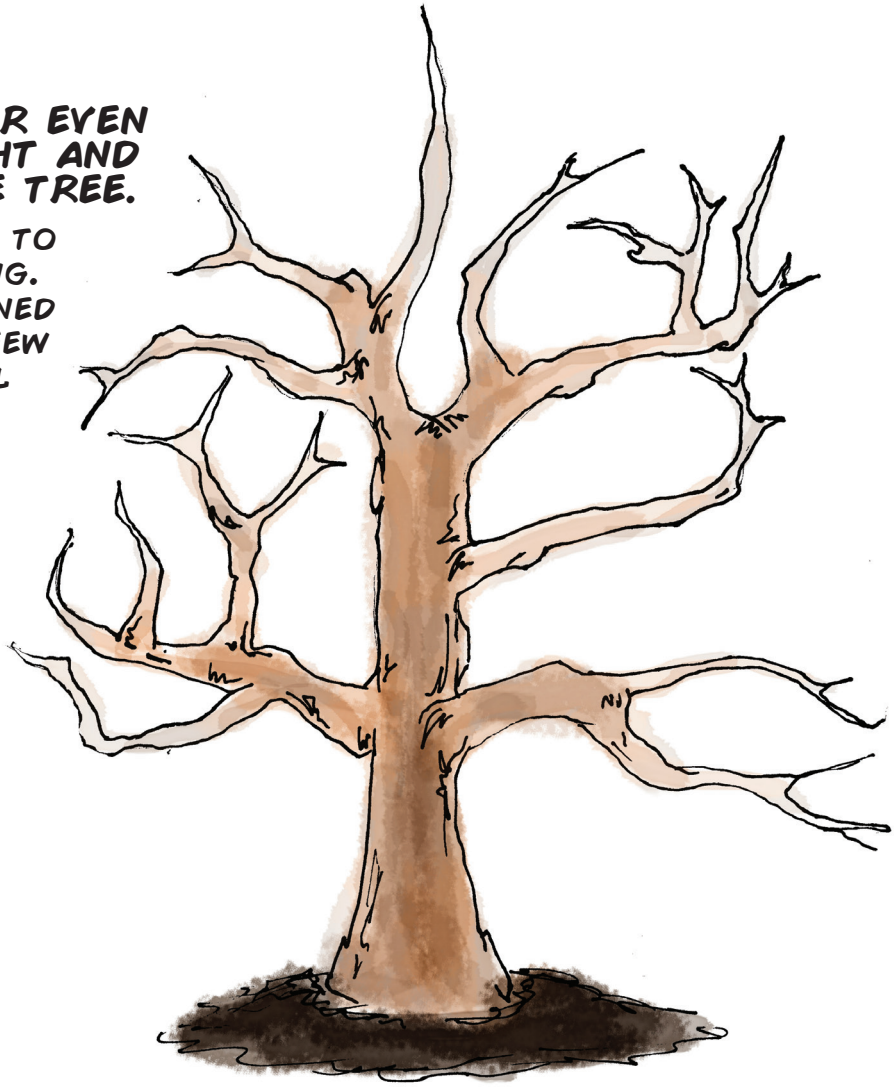


AIM TO REMOVE NO MORE THAN 1/4 OF THE TREE'S BRANCHES IN A YEAR.

CUT THE BRANCH AT THE BRANCH COLLAR, THE AREA WHERE THE BARK CHANGES DIRECTIONS, FOR FASTER AND BETTER HEALING.

GOOD PRUNING ALLOWS FOR EVEN DISTRIBUTION OF SUNLIGHT AND AIRFLOW THROUGHOUT THE TREE.

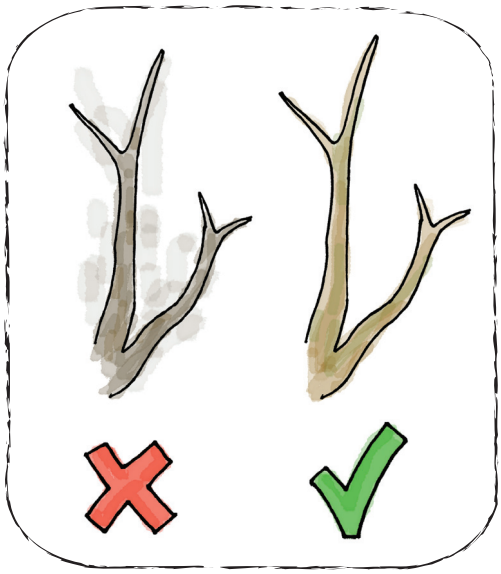
THIS IS THE MAIN PRINCIPLE TO KEEP IN MIND WHILE PRUNING. IF A TREE HAS NOT BEEN PRUNED IN A WHILE, IT MAY TAKE A FEW YEARS TO GET TO THE IDEAL CONDITION.



KEEP ALL THIS IN MIND AND YOUR TREES WILL REMAIN HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE.

HAPPY PRUNING!

March



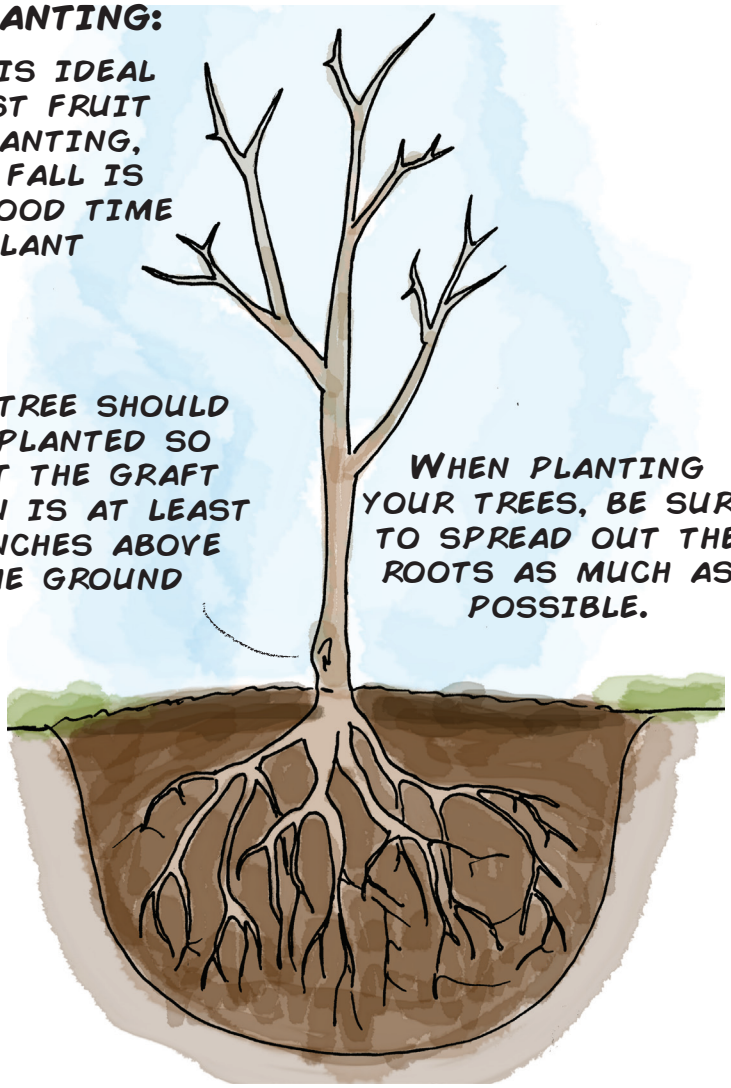
Berry Pruning:

For optimal berry production, be sure to prune your berry canes before the weather gets too warm.

Remove canes that have grey or pealing bark, and any old fruiting branches. Keep canes with bark that is still alive.

Tree Planting:

Spring is ideal for most fruit tree planting, though fall is also a good time to plant



The tree should be planted so that the graft union is at least 4 inches above the ground

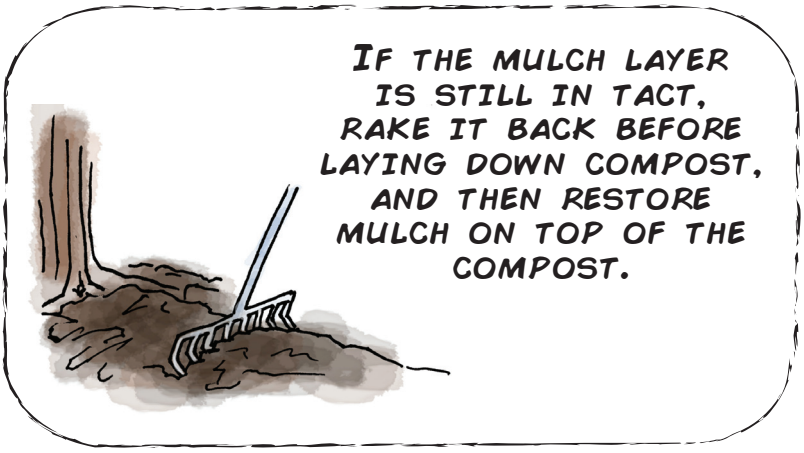
When planting your trees, be sure to spread out the roots as much as possible.

Don't forget to water them!

April

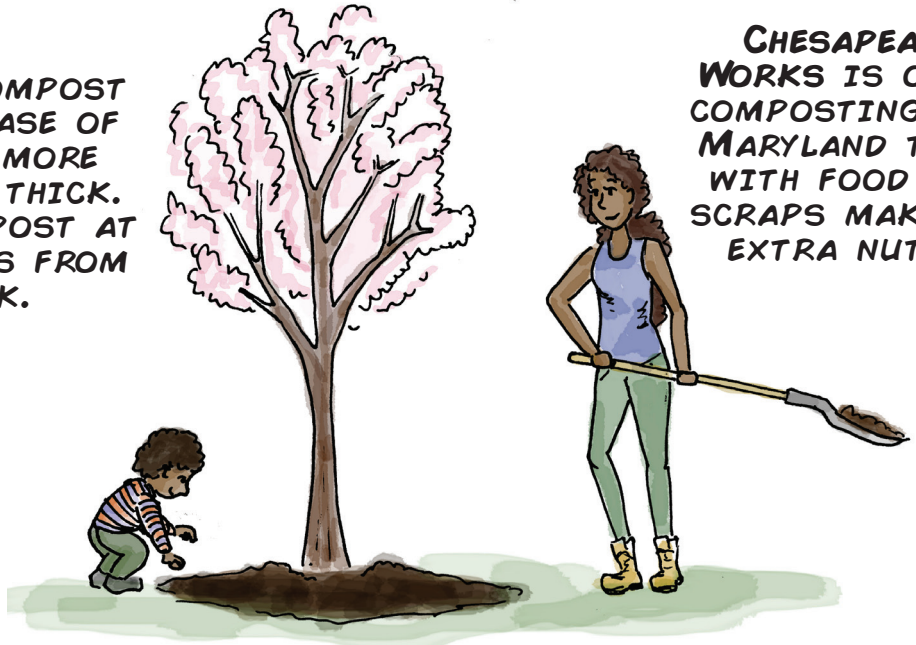
The air is warming and the trees are blossoming, so it's a good time to get out and put down compost.

Spreading compost around your plants adds nutrients to the soil. These nutrients can make their way to your fruit which makes them healthier, tastier, and more resistent to disease.



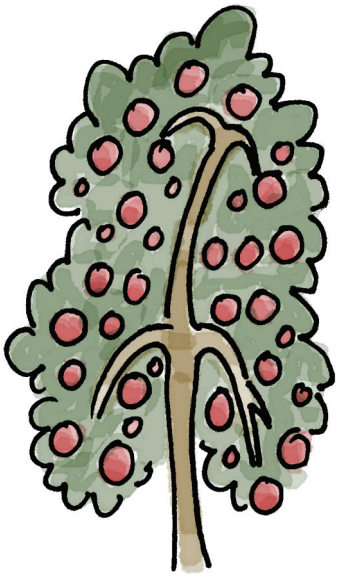
If the mulch layer is still in tact, rake it back before laying down compost, and then restore mulch on top of the compost.

Spread the compost around the base of the tree no more than an inch thick. Keep the compost at least 4 inches from the trunk.



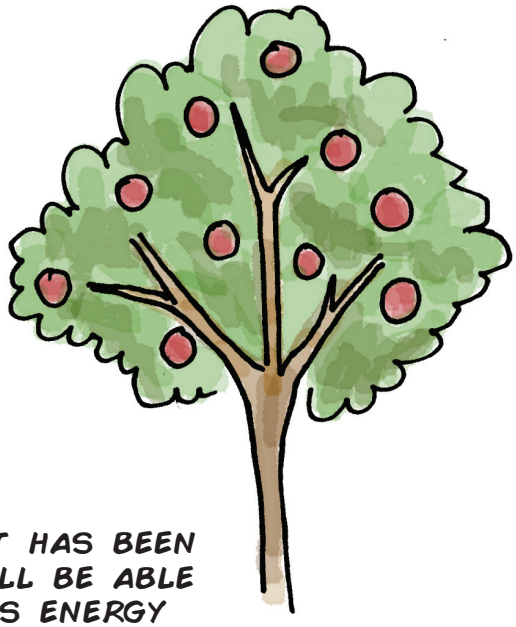
Chesapeake Compost Works is one of the few composting companies in Maryland that composts with food scraps. Food scraps make the compost extra nutrient-dense.

May



Fruit Thinning

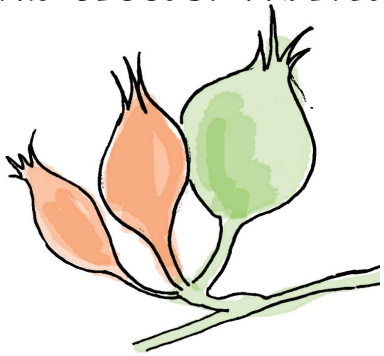
Come late May, it's time to start thinning your fruit. Fruit thinning reduces stress put on the tree, enables early pest prevention, and allows fruit to fully mature.



A tree that has been thinned will be able to put its energy into growing fully developed fruit

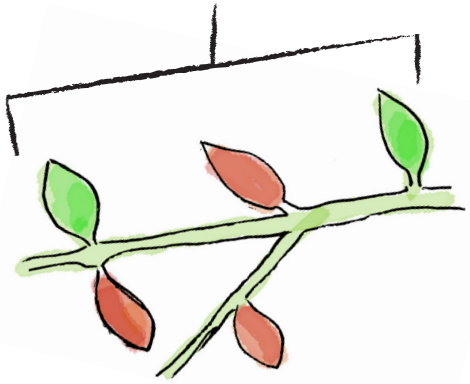
A tree that has not been thinned will produce a large quantity of fruit, but the fruit may not be big enough to eat or it may suffer more pest damage

For fruit set clusters, generally remove all but the biggest fruitlet



The exception being, if the largest fruitlet has signs of pest damage, remove it and choose the next largest.

Along the branch, leave about 6 inches between fruitlets



All picked fruit should be put in a yard waste bag to remove pests that might have laid eggs in the fruitlets or might eat the fallen fruit.

Put your yard waste out with your trash or take it to a citizen drop-off center

June

Branch Training

Ideally, your tree's branches will grow horizontally to allow for less crowding and more airflow. Sometimes we need to help our trees reach an ideal shape.

Train any branches that are longer than 2 feet to grow horizontally. Use string or bungee cords to gently pull the branches so they are paralell to the ground.

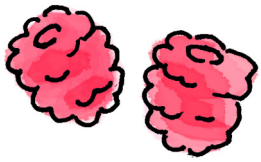
Don't tie the knot too tightly to the branch

Use stakes or weights to give tension.

June Harvest

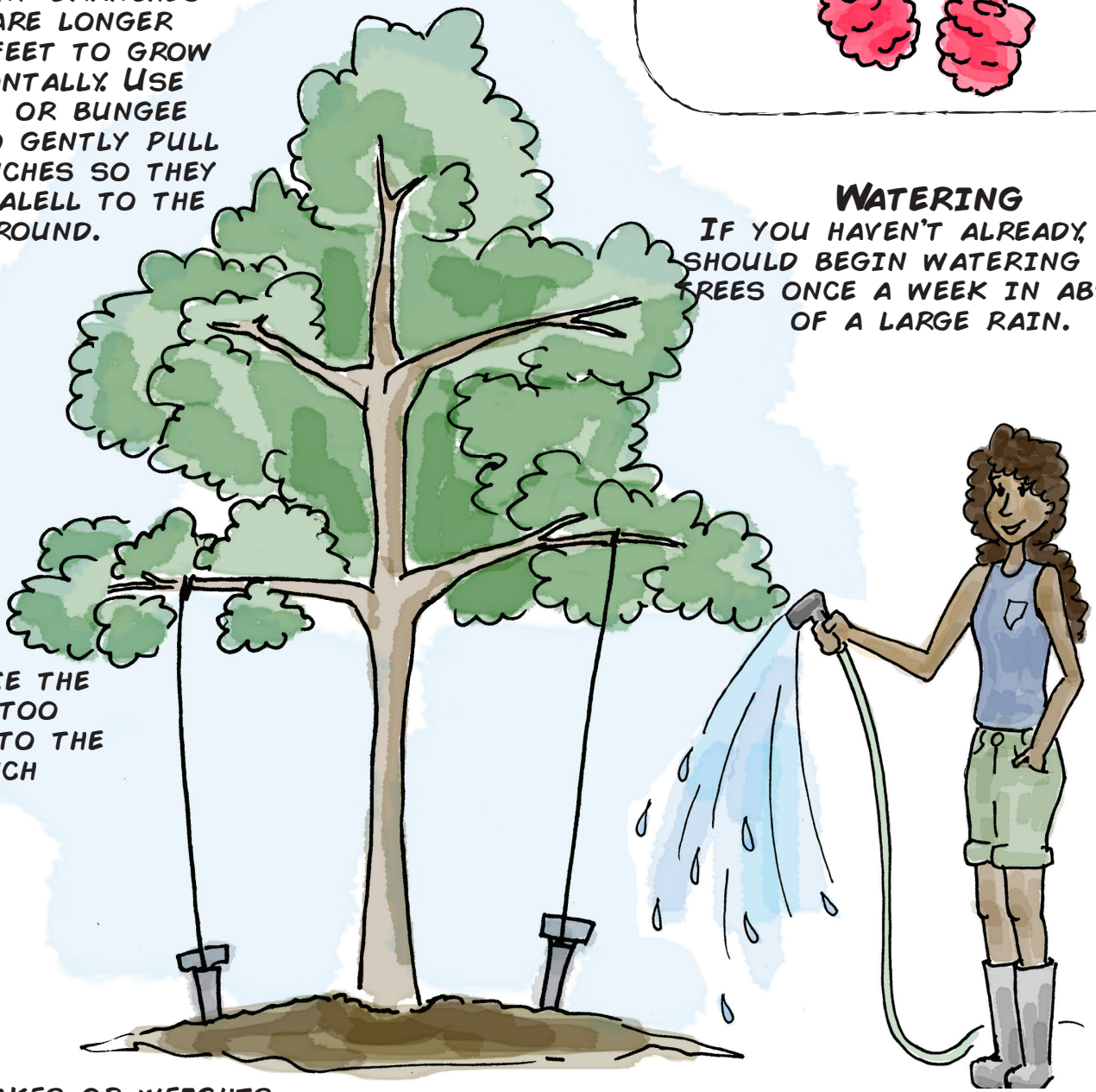
June is the best time to harvest Mulberries.

Cherries, wineberries, and serviceberries can also be found and can be harvested gently by hand.



Watering

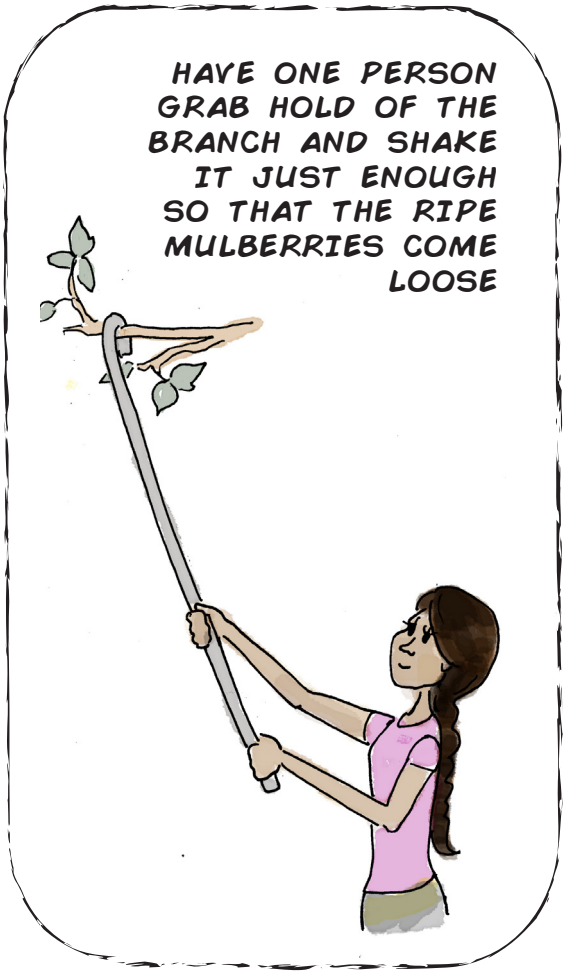
If you haven't already, you should begin watering your trees once a week in absence of a large rain.

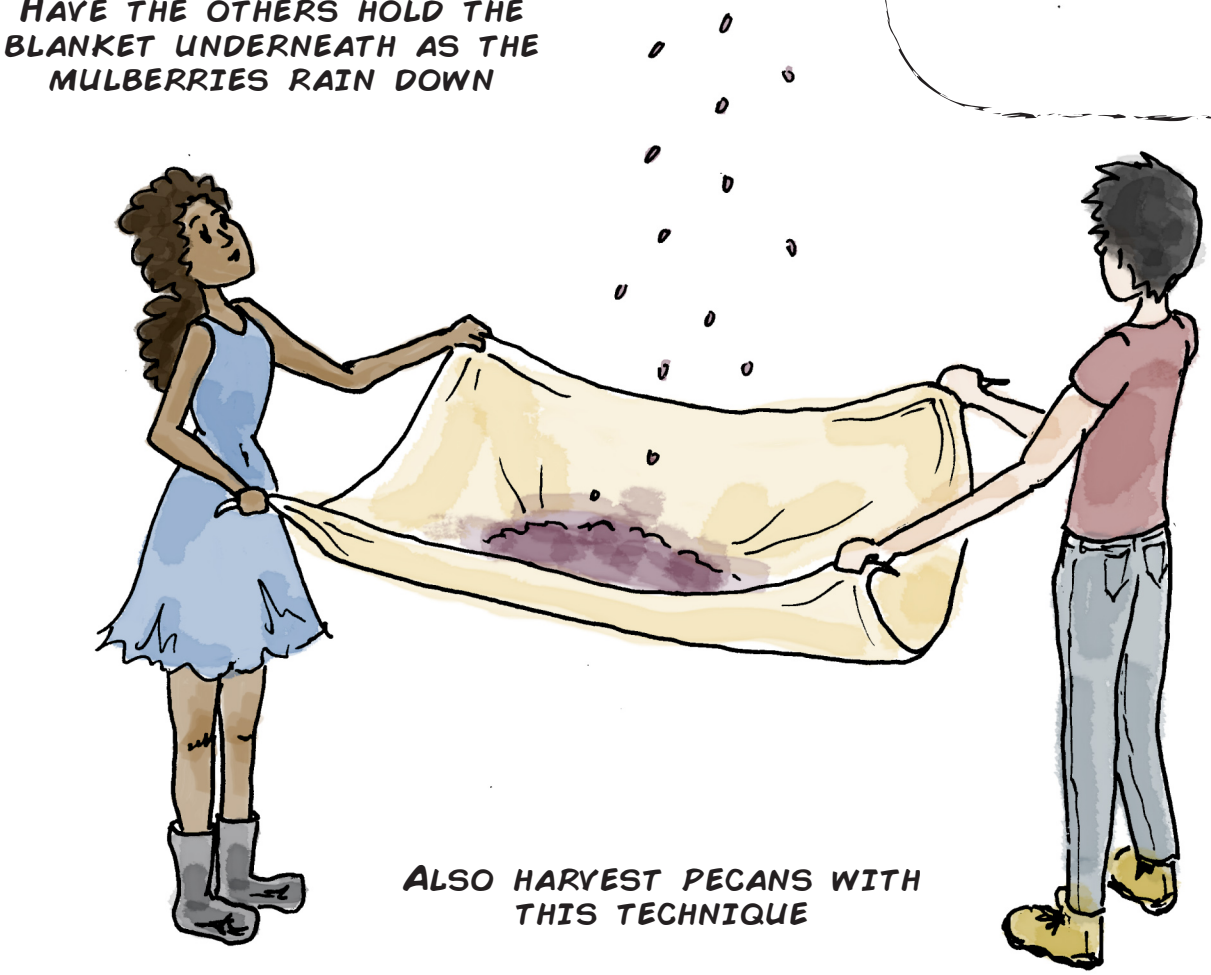


Water around the base of the tree, not directly on the trunk.

Harvesting Mulberries

During June, Mulberries are falling off the trees ready to be harvested. Harvesting mulberries can be a fun unique experience, and is easiest to do with a few people.

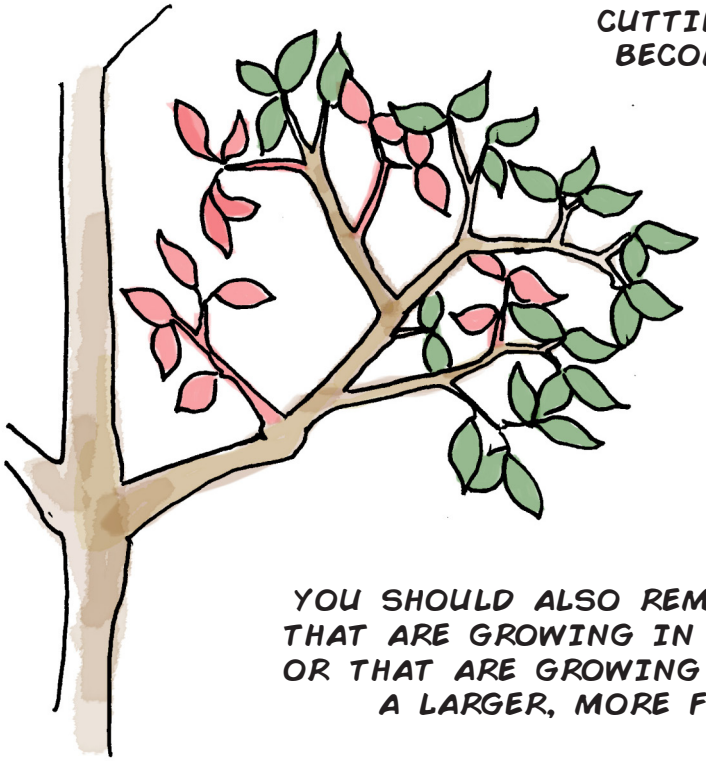




July

Summer Pruning

Summer Pruning is not as intensive as winter pruning. You should only prune small branches that can be cut with a hand shears. It is best for cutting away small growth before it becomes full branches that clutter the tree.



Use a your shears to clean out root suckers, water spouts, and other small unwanted growth on the tree.

You should also remove small branches that are growing in towards the center, or that are growing in the direction of a larger, more fruitful branch.

Weeding

Its always a good idea to pull out any weeds near your fruit trees to remove competition for soil nutrients and sunlight.

July Harvest

July has a variety of berries and other fruits to harvest by hand inluding peaches, plums, raspberries, elderberries, and blueberries

Spraying

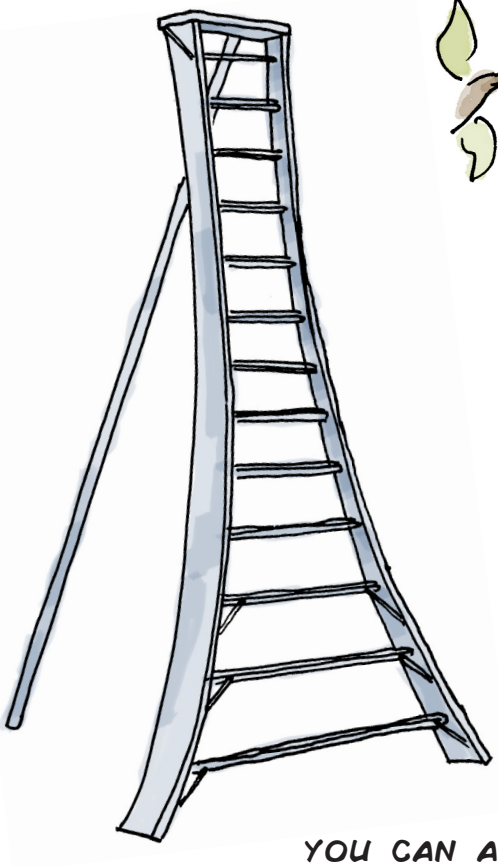
A simple mixture of water and milk can be sprayed on your trees to prevent fungal damage. Mix one quart of water with a half cup of low-fat milk. Adding a few drops of dish soap will help the mixture stick

If you have just one or two trees, you can put the mixture in a hand-held spray bottle and cover your trees. If you have more trees, you may want to consider a backpack sprayer.

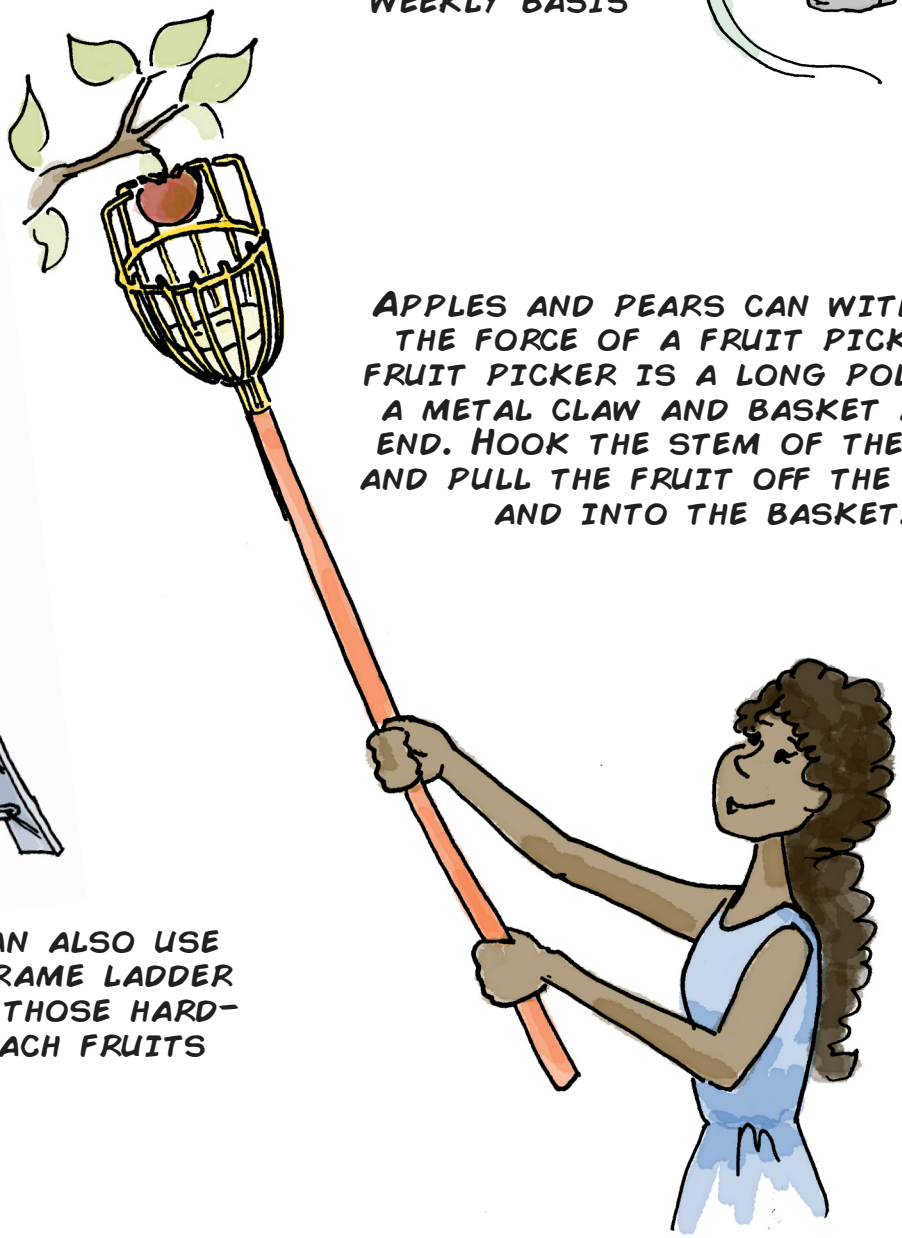
August

August Harvest
August brings many favorite fruits, such as apples, pears, and figs

Continue watering your trees on a weekly basis



You can also use an A-frame ladder to get those hard-to-reach fruits



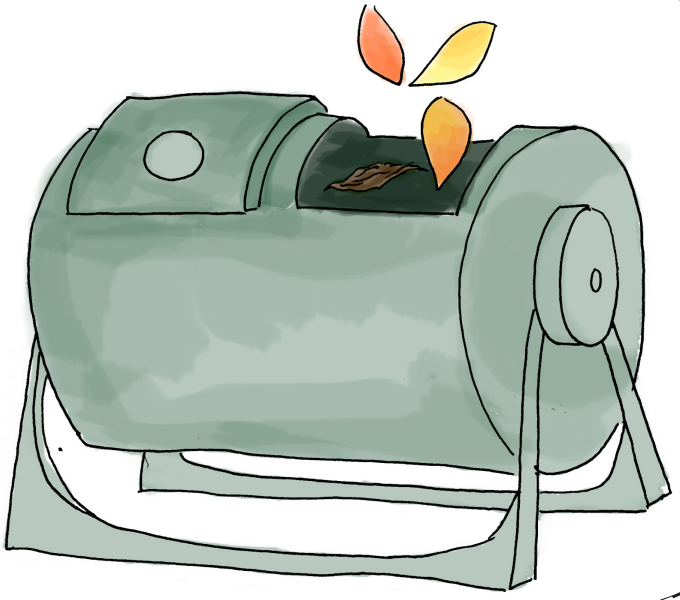
Apples and pears can withstand the force of a fruit picker. A fruit picker is a long pole with a metal claw and basket at the end. Hook the stem of the fruit and pull the fruit off the branch and into the basket.

September

September Harvest

Continue harvesting apples and pears. Raspberries may have a second harvest around this time. Additionally, you can harvest chestnuts, pawpaws, and hazelnuts

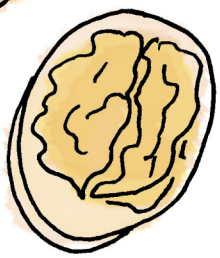
Pick up any fallen rotting fruit from the ground and throw it in a yard waste bag or a closed composter to prevent further pest damage and rot



October

October Harvest

Continue harvesting apples. You can also harvest pecans, walnuts, and persimmons. Pecans are harvested similar to mulberries.



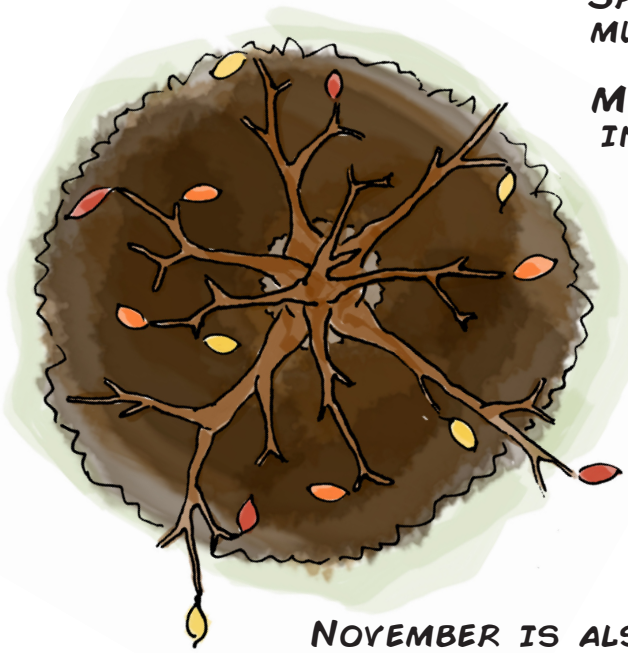
Celebrate a bountiful harvest!

There are so many different ways to use your fruit. You can press your more tart apples into cider. You can put thin slices through a dehydrator for dried fruit. You can bake or create whatever you choose or just enjoy the raw fruit, but be sure to save a few for apple bobbing!

Do you have too much fruit? Consider sharing it with your friends, family, and neighbors, or even donating it to a local school or community center.

November

Rake away fallen leaves and clear any remaining fruit from the tree and ground. Put everything in a yard waste bag or closed composter to keep rot and pests from your trees.



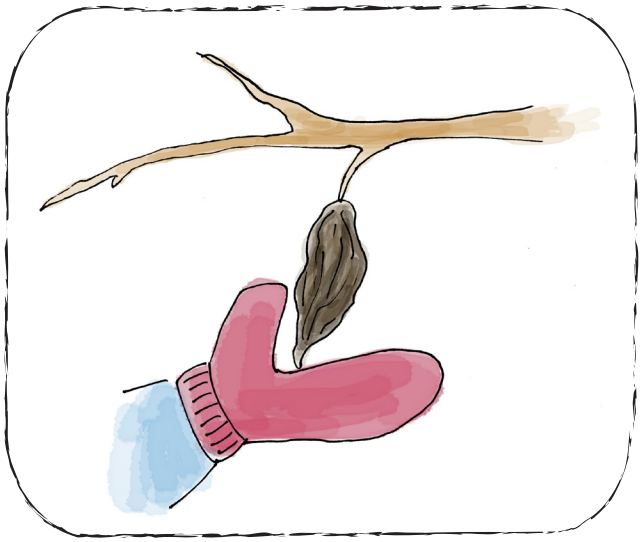
Spread a 2-inch layer of mulch in a donut around your tree.
Mulch should remain 1-2 inches from the base of the tree

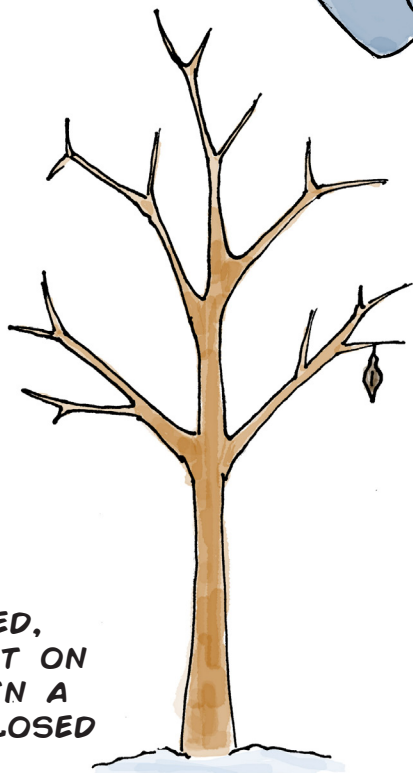
November is also time to plant new trees! Trees should be planted at least 15-feet apart. See March for more planting advice.

December

Let Visions of sugar plums dance in your head!

December is a great time to start dreaming up new fruit trees for the spring planting season. Think about all the possibilities and order them soon.

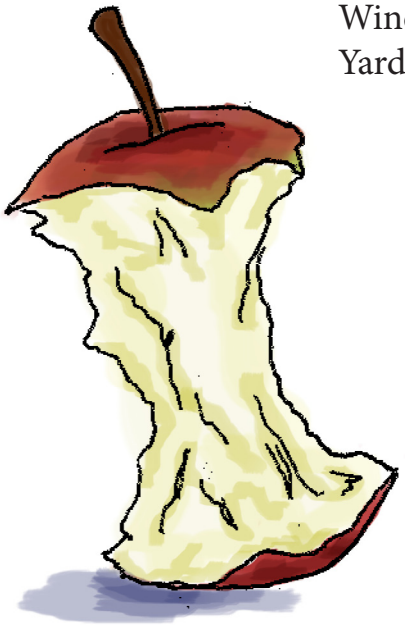




Remove any old, dried, **mummified fruit** left on the tree, and put it in a yard waste bag or a closed composter

Index

Apples 15, 16, 17
Blueberries 14
Branch Collar 7
Branch Training 11
Cherries 11
Chestnuts 16
Closed composter 16, 19
Compost 9
Elderberries 14
Figs 15
Fruit Picker 15
Fruit Thinning 10
Graft Union 8
Hand shears 5, 13
Harvest 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17
Hazelnuts 16
Ladder, A-frame 15
Milk spray 14
Mulberries 11, 12
Mulch 19
Mummified Fruit 19
Pawpaws 16
Peaches 14
Pears 15, 16
Pecans 12, 17
Persimmons 17
Pest Damage 10, 14, 16, 18
Planting 8, 18, 19
Plums 14
Pruning 5, 6, 7, 8
    berry 8
    equipment 5
    summer 13
    winter 5, 6, 7
Pruning Loppers 5
Pruning Saw 5
Rake 9, 18
Raspberries 14, 16
Serviceberries 11
Sharpening Stone 5
Sprays 14
Walnuts 17
Watering 8, 11, 15
Weeding 13
Wineberries 11
Yard Waste 10, 18, 19



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