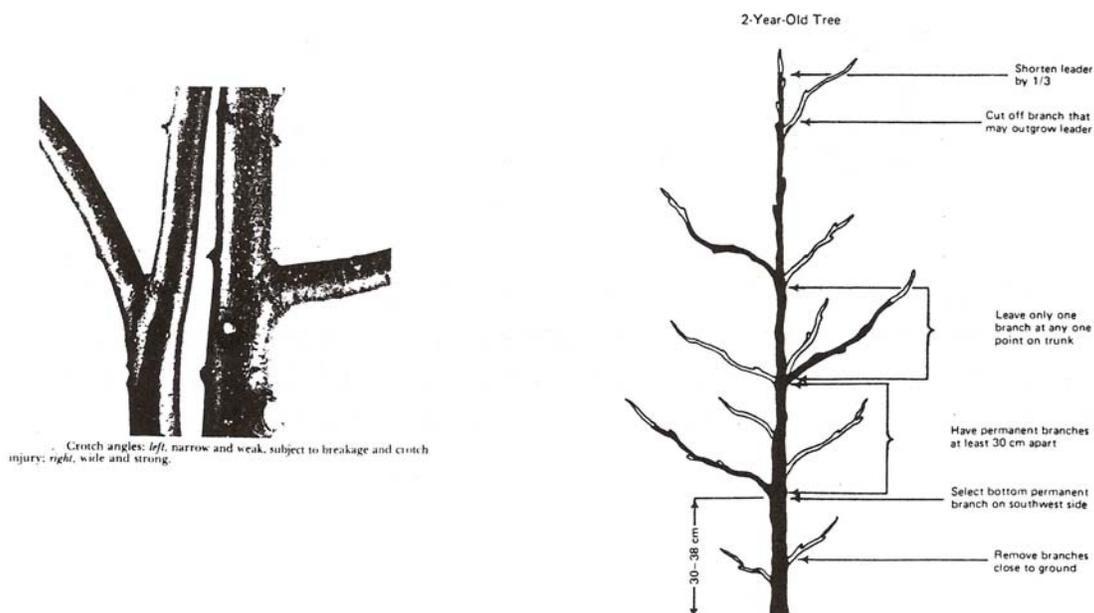


Pruning Young Fruit Trees

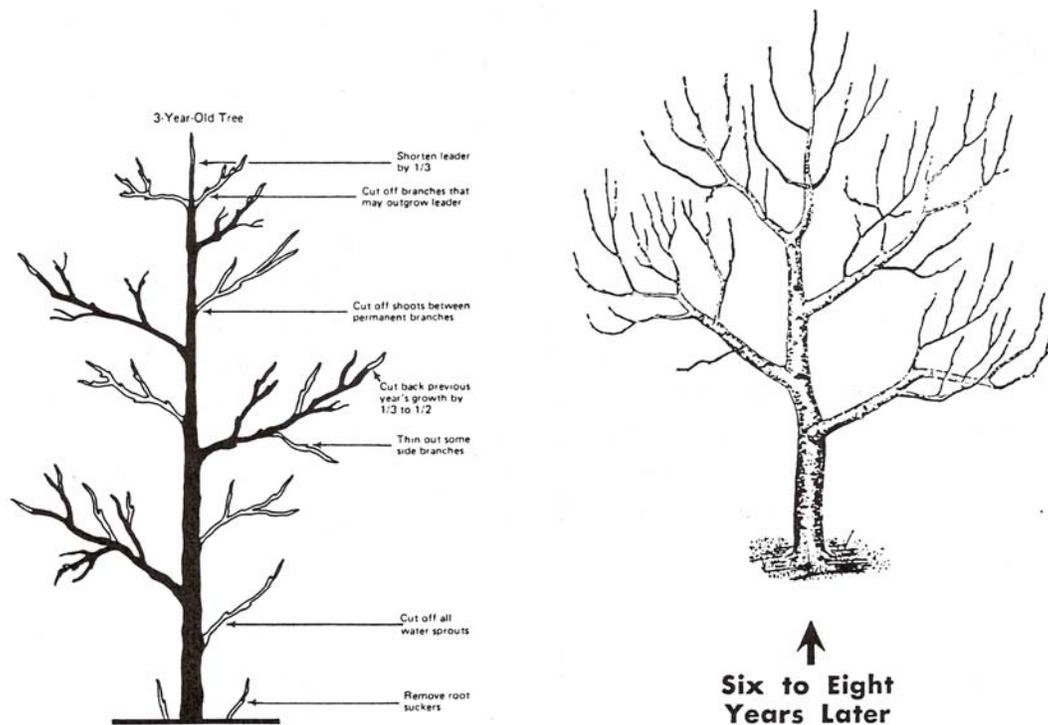
On the prairies, prune and train apples, plums, pears and apricots to form low-growing trees with strong scaffold branches close to the ground. Prune carefully to help the trees develop strong frameworks, which can bear the load of fruit and resist damage from windstorms or heavy snow. Pruning is also necessary to remove diseased and dead wood, to remove water sprouts and base suckers, to prevent crowding in the centers of trees, and to renew old trees.

Remove broken or diseased branches as soon as they are discovered, but do your annual pruning between March and early May. You will need a good quality hand pruners for cuts smaller than an inch, and loppers and a pruning saw for larger cuts. All tools should be sharp and clean, cuts must be made as cleanly and neatly as possible. Branches should be removed to the branch collar, do not leave stubs.

After the tree has made one year of growth, pruning is important to shape it. The modified central leader system of pruning is the preferred style for the prairies. If more than one central leader is present, keep the thickest, which is closest to the center, and remove any other competing leaders. Choose 3 branches as permanent scaffolds which are growing outward from the main trunk, including when possible, the bottom one on the SW side to protect the trunk from sunscald. Choose wide angled branches that are about 30 cm apart on the trunk, remove other branches. The lowest scaffold branch is usually 2-3 feet above the ground. Then prune back these permanent scaffold branches by a half and head back the leader to balance the tree.



Two years after planting, choose one or two more scaffold branches. Aim for a total of 5-8 wide angled scaffold branches, spaced 30-45 cm apart up the trunk, and growing outward in all directions so the shape of the maturing tree is well balanced. If any of the scaffold branches grows much longer than the others, shorten it to maintain a balanced tree. Thin out side branches developing off the main scaffold branches which are thin, growing backward toward the tree center, spaced to closely together (space 8-12" apart for these secondary branches), or growing downward from the bottom of the scaffold branch.. Then prune back to half of the previous season's growth the remaining side and scaffold branches. Cut the leader back to promote a low-growing tree. The desire is to keep the ultimate height of the tree 10-12 feet. After this shaping, only corrective pruning such as shortening the leader and scaffold branches, removing vertically growing water sprouts, branches growing backward into the tree center, broken or diseased branches, or base sprouts around ground level.



The maturing fruit tree will have a straight central trunk, with 5-8 scaffold branches with strong, nearly 90 degree angles, the lowest preferably on the SW side, 2-3 feet above ground. Secondary branches spaced 8-12" apart arch upward and outward, the center is open and the final height is maintained at 10-12 feet.