

# Curb Your (Tree's) Enthusiasm

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• **Notes on Summer Pruning Fruit Trees**

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• **CRFG Golden Gate Chapter July, 2023 meeting**

# Benefits of Summer Snipping

“Calms” exuberant growth, helps keep trees smaller by reducing the amount of foliage, and thus amount of stored starches

Creates more sunlight in center of tree

Helps with disease control, thinning of fruit

Gives an opportunity to fix winter pruning mistakes

Promotes new vegetative growth for future grafting



# Things to Ponder While Pruning

People tend to prune young trees too little and old trees too much –R.L.Stebbins

You will be REDIRECTING growth, in addition to REDUCING size

Long internodes signifies vigor and usually means the tree can be pruned 'hard'

When you find yourself standing under the tree in beautiful, dappled sunlight, you've done a good job!

Textbooks show trees in ideal conditions, your reality includes shading from fences, competition from other trees.



# Meet your best buds!

Apical (Terminal) Buds – the ‘Boss’ of the branch

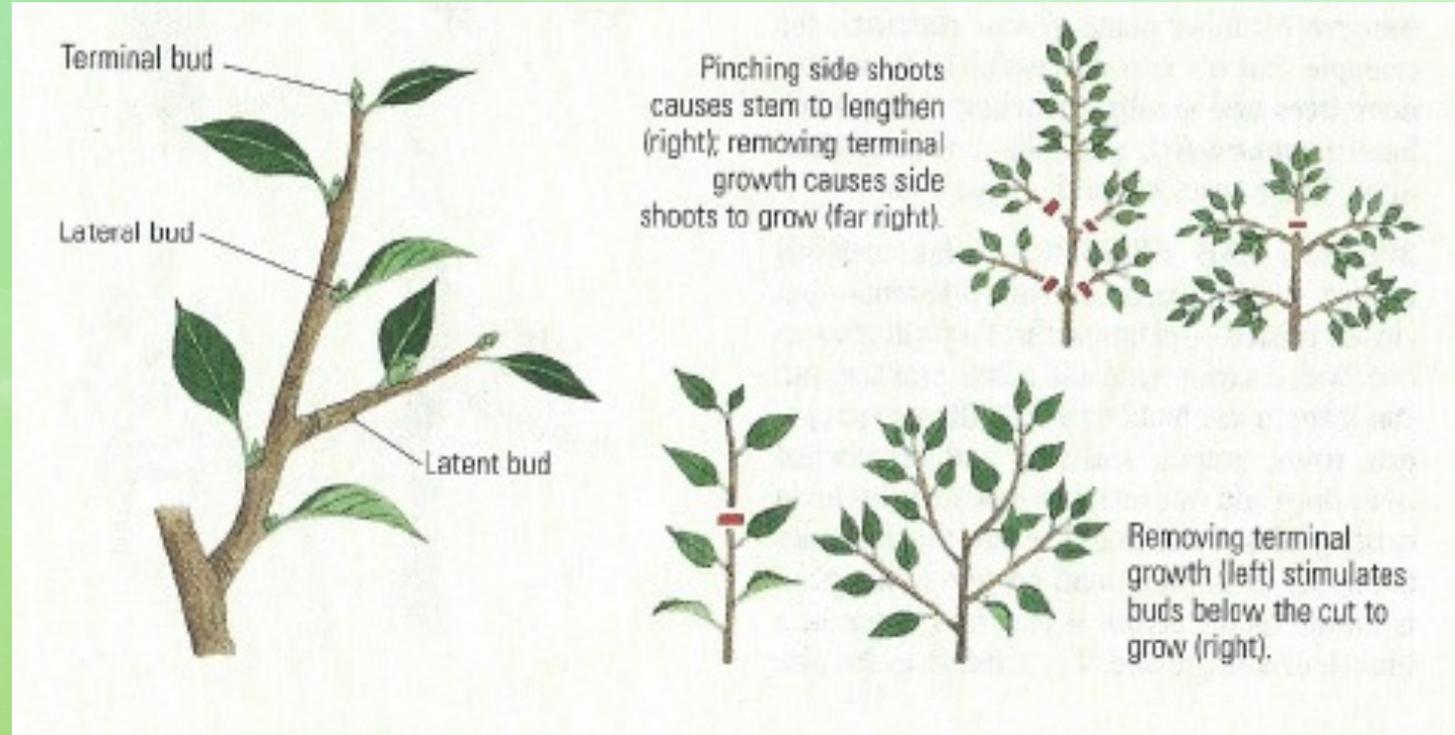
Lateral buds – waiting for instruction from Apical

Vegetative buds can make leaves or branches, one-year-old wood has only vegetative buds

Fruiting buds occur on one year old wood or older.

Latent buds can be triggered to become branch, leaf or a flower

Hormones kick in when you remove the growing tip

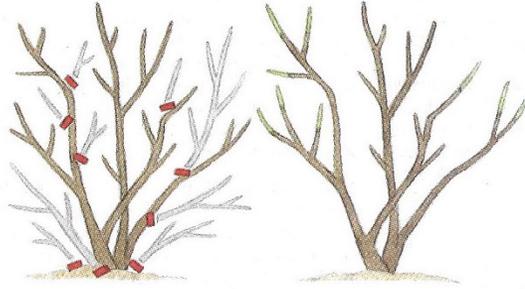


## LIFE SPAN OF FLOWER/FRUIT BUDS

| FRUIT               | LIFE SPAN   |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Apples, pears       | 5-10 years  |
| Apricots, apriums   | 3-5 years   |
| Asian plums, pluots | 4-5 years   |
| Cherries            | 10-15 years |
| European plums      | 5-8 years   |
| Peaches, nectarines | 1 year      |
| Quince              | 1 year      |

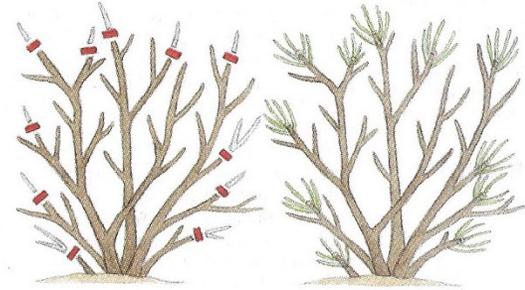
Source: Orin Martin

## TYPES OF PRUNING CUTS



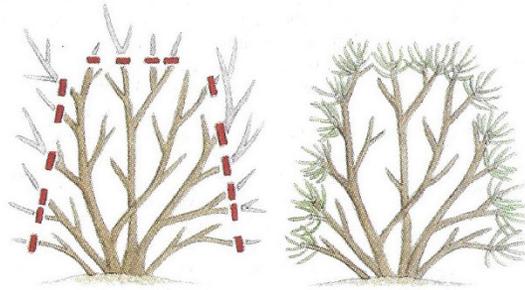
### THINNING

Thinning cuts open up a plant and cause the least amount of regrowth.



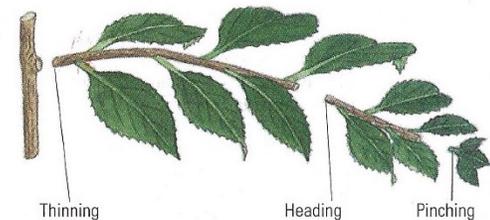
### HEADING

Heading cuts produce clusters of shoots from buds below the cuts.



### SHEARING

Shearing, which is really random heading, produces an outer layer of dense, twiggly growth from buds below the cuts.



Thinning

Heading

Pinching

Shown here are three types of pruning cuts. Pinching removes the terminal growth; heading removes part of the shoot; and thinning eliminates the entire shoot.

# Where & When you cut Determines Responses

All can be done after a tree, vine or shrub is fully leafed out and actively growing:

in our area roughly  
June through August.

Late summer plants start to go into a state of physiological rest even before dormant, so not effective at controlling size after that time.

# Four Types of Pruning Cuts

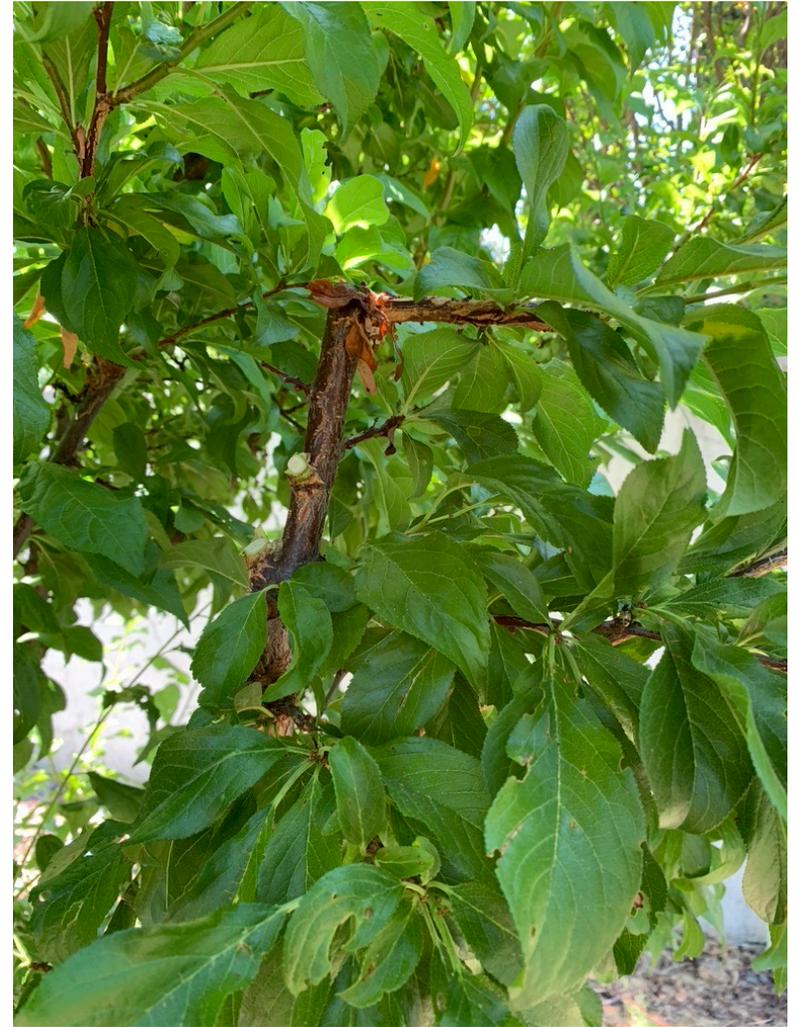
- Thinning Cut = trim to a BIGGER branch,
- Reducing Cut = trim to a SMALLER branch.
- Heading Cut = trim to a bud
- \*Plunge Pruning = cut to an interior branch.



# Thinning Cut

Removing to a bigger branch allows more sunlight to penetrate;

Tall, vertical growth is often a response to dormant pruning, or just because the tree is feeling frisky

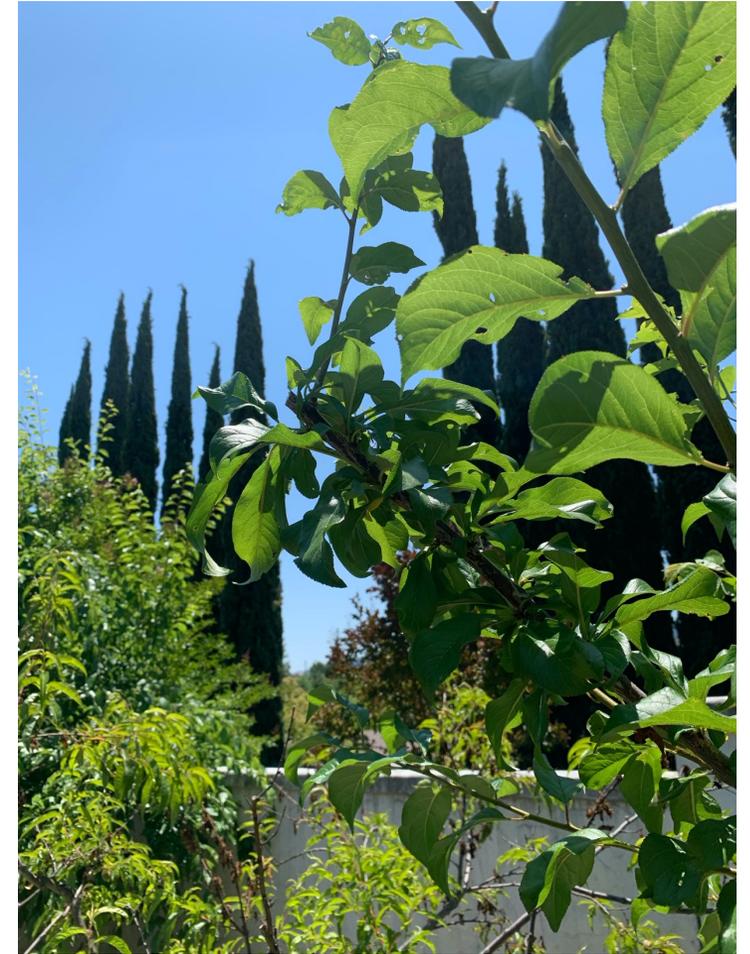




# Reduction Cut

Trimmed to a smaller branch, reducing cuts are intended to redirect growth, reduce size and provide future fruiting buds.

This cut can sometimes trigger response from latent or vegetative buds below the cut.



# Heading Cuts

- By removing the terminal bud, lateral buds are activated to produce more shoots, or flowers. Where this cut is made along the branch determines how the tree will respond. Pruning to a spur stops branch elongation.

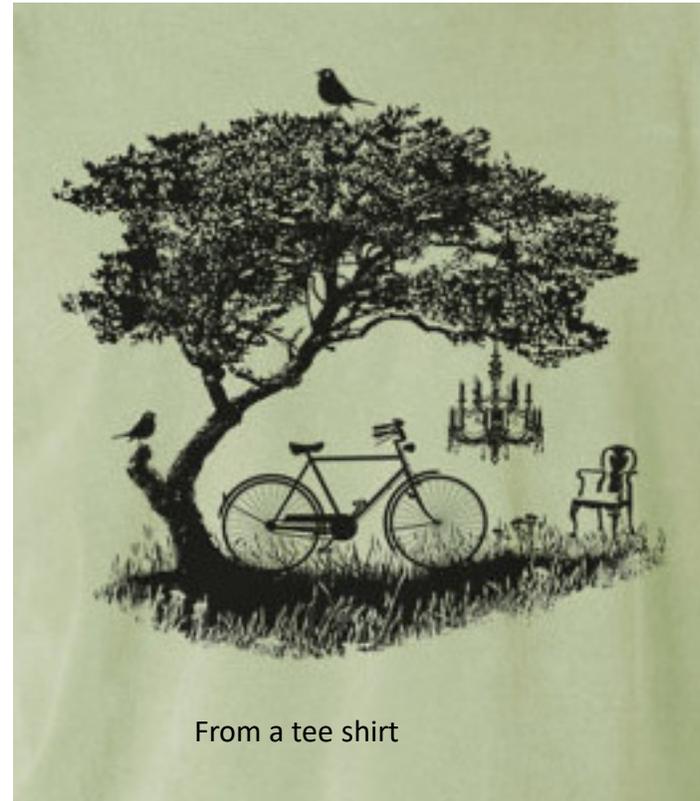


# “Plunge” Prune\*

- Technique is to grab a branch that is sticking out and plunge your secateurs inside. The cut can be ‘blind’ in that you’re not aiming for a particular branch or bud to cut to. The idea is to promote response (regrowth) deeper inside the tree and allow air and light to reach inside. For shrubby plants such as citrus and Feijoa, trimming can be semi-random (thinning and heading), and this is a reliable method for reducing size. Also useful for Persimmon.
- Demonstration by Pomological Charade
- \*This may be a term I made up.

# Summer Pruning Pointers by Tree Type

- Apples and Pears
- Apricots
- Plums
- Nectarines & Peaches
- Persimmons & Figs (!)
- Citrus & Feijoa
- Cane Berries and Kiwi



From a tee shirt



# Apples and Pears

- Thinning out fruit helps prevent spread of Codling Moth
- Heading (shortening) to a spur stops growth of the branch (usually)

- Be judicious in thinning cuts—too many cuts risks sun scald and borers
- Spurs last many years, but keep several new laterals as replacements and trim away oldest spurs



# Plums, Apricots, Pluots

Stone fruits have strong apical dominance, so summer trimming involves thinning out water sprouts and tall vertical growth, plus heading laterals to encourage more branches that can fruit next year.

Fruiting buds last up to five years for Plums and Apricots. Peaches form on one-year-old wood.



Apricot “Before” is shown slightly transparent. Additional trimming to be done after harvest.

# Plums want to be big trees



Catalina Plum before and in process, before the Yellow Jackets objected

## Persimmon & Fig

Persimmons and figs can both produce fruit on new wood: summer pruning sacrifices some of the crop,

They both want to be big trees, summer snipping helps keep them manageable.

Heading back the fruiting branches by a couple buds can help force growth lower and inside the tree.

Both trees are highly susceptible to sun scald.



# Feijoa, Guava and Citrus

All can be easily kept to any desired shape and size by plunge pruning late spring and early summer.

This promotes twigs with new wood, from which flower buds emerge next spring.



# Cane Berries and Kiwi

Tend to be vigorous growers

Throw out strong replacement canes (vegetative this year, fruiting next year for berries, in two years for kiwi).

OK to cut all but a few select canes

Cut all the way to the ground (berries) or to main lateral (kiwi)

May need to be done twice



# Simple Rules and Good

## Sharp Tools

From  
Western  
Garden  
Book Co.  
2001

For thinning cuts, leave enough foliage to protect inside limbs from sun scald

Cut any branch that pokes you in the eye. Cut to allow you to set up a ladder or get inside the tree

Always OK to cut dead, diseased, damaged or dumb branches. Dispose of diseased tissue in trash. Trim root suckers

Usually not big branches, maybe ~thumb size max,  
\*Leaf-to-Fruit Ratio\* ~30:1

Don't trim after the tree is no longer actively growing, or before fully leafed out

Don't leave a stub unless you want more  
\*bushiness\*

Set-up and Clean-up take 50% of total time



# Good, Sharp Tools



Fiskars Stik Pruner, Loppers



Bypass Pruners  
Felco has versions  
for smaller hands



- Diamond Stone,  
Rubbing Alcohol,  
Scotch Brite

Forged  
Steel  
Lop



Silky or other  
Japanese  
style saw with  
fine teeth

