

***The content of this article 'Fruit gardening: What can I prune right now?' was prepared by [The University of Minnesota Extension](#) and has been revised and republished by FreshFruitPortal.com.***

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As we clean up our gardens for winter, many gardeners have been asking when they can start pruning their fruit trees and shrubs. There is something satisfying about having everything clean and ready for next season, but hurrying to prune can do more harm than good.

## **Raspberries**

Prune once canes are dormant and leaves have fallen, or wait until the spring. For fall-bearing raspberries, mow them down to about 3 inches above the ground. For summer-bearing raspberries, prune off the canes that have produced fruit and leave the rest. Most growers wait until spring to prune.

## **Blueberries**

Wait until late winter. Because blueberries grow so low to the ground, most fruit growers will wait to prune until the snow has melted enough that they can access the bottoms of the plants. Pruning in fall is unnecessary.

## **Grapes**

Technically, grapes can be pruned once all leaves have fallen and they are fully dormant. But in practice, it is best and safest to wait until January or February to prune. There is no hurry to prune grapevines, especially if you just have a few vines, so it is best to wait until late winter.

Why? Because pruning too early risks accidentally pruning before the plants are fully dormant, which means you're removing energy from the plant. Also, pruning during above-freezing temperatures allows trunk diseases to enter the wood through the pruning cuts.

## **Fruit trees (apples, pears, cherries, plums)**

Like most fruits mentioned above, wait until mid or late winter to start pruning your fruit trees. The best time to prune fruit trees is after the coldest winter temperatures have passed, and before the buds begin to swell in spring. This translates to February to March in Minnesota.

### **Prune to promote plant health**

- Remove dead or dying branches injured by disease, severe insect infestation, animals, storms, or other adverse mechanical damage.
- Remove branches that rub together.
- Remove branch stubs

Avoid topping trees. Removing large branches leaves stubs that can cause several health problems. It also destroys the plant's natural shape and promotes suckering and the development of weak branch structures.

### **Use the right tools for pruning**

The right tools make pruning easier and help you do a good job. Keeping tools well-maintained and sharp will improve their performance. There are many tools for pruning, but the following will probably suffice for most applications:

- A good pair of **pruning shears** is probably one of the most important tools. Cuts up to 3/4 inches in diameter may be made with them.
- **Lopping shears** are similar to pruning shears, but their long handles provide greater leverage needed to cut branches up to 1 1/2 inches in diameter.
- **Hedge shears** are meant only for pruning hedges, nothing else. They usually cut succulent or small stems best.
- **Hand saws** are very important for cutting branches over 1 inch in diameter. Many types of hand saws are available. Special tri-cut or razor tooth pruning saws cut through larger branches - up to 4 inches in diameter - with ease.
- **Pole saws** allow for extended reach with a long handle, but they must be used carefully as it is difficult to achieve clean cuts with them.
- Small **chain saws** are available for use on larger branches. Operators must wear protective clothing and exercise caution when using them. Never use chain saws to reach above your shoulders, or when you are on a ladder.

## General pruning guidelines

- Remove diseased, broken or dead branches.
  - Remove any downward-growing branches.
  - If two limbs are crossed, entangled or otherwise competing, remove one of them completely at its base.
  - Remove any limbs along the trunk that are bigger in diameter than the trunk.
  - Remove suckers coming up from the roots or low on the trunk.
  - Remove vigorous vertical branches, called watersprouts.
  - Make pruning cuts close to the branch collar at the base of the limb.
    - For larger limbs, start the cut from the underside of the limb to avoid tearing the bark.
  - Remove large limbs first, starting with the top of the tree.
  - "Thinning" cuts remove entire branches at the branch collar and are usually the recommended type of cut.
  - "Heading" cuts remove only part of a branch and encourage vegetation growth below the cut and are not as common.
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Source: [University of Minnesota Extension](#)