

# Fruit Tree Pruning Calendar

When to prune apples, pears, peaches, and stone fruit in Northern Utah.

Most fruit trees in Cache Valley die from too much enthusiasm, not too little. We see it every spring: a homeowner finally gets after the apple tree in February, takes off forty percent of the canopy, and the tree spends the next three years sulking. This calendar is the dampener.

## The rule, in one paragraph

Prune deciduous fruit trees while they are dormant or while they are actively growing fast. Avoid the in-between. Dormant pruning (January through early March in Cache Valley) is best for structural work because the tree is not bleeding sap and wounds heal cleanly when growth restarts. Active-growth pruning (June through July) is best for size control and is the only time peach, cherry, and apricot should see anything heavier than light shaping. Late summer and fall pruning stimulates growth that will not harden off before the first freeze. Do not do it.

### The anti-upsell principle

If your tree is overgrown, restoration pruning takes one to three winters, not one. Removing more than twenty-five percent of a canopy in a single year stresses the tree harder than the neglect did. If anyone tells you they can fix a decade of overgrowth in an afternoon, find someone else.

## How to use this calendar

The next page is a month-by-month guide. Apples and pears get the left column, stone fruit (peach, cherry, plum, apricot) gets the right. The two sides differ on purpose. Apples tolerate dormant pruning fine. Stone fruit hates it, because cuts made in cold weather invite canker, gummosis, and silver leaf disease.

If you have ornamental trees (maples, oaks, ash, lindens, hawthorn) the rule is mostly the same: dormant pruning is best. The exceptions are oaks (winter only, due to oak-wilt risk where present) and birches and maples, which bleed a lot of sap if cut in late winter (cosmetically ugly but not actually harmful). Call us if you are not sure.

## Month by month

MONTH	APPLES & PEARS	STONE FRUIT (peach, cherry, plum, apricot)
<b>January</b>	Prime structural pruning. Trees fully dormant, cuts heal cleanly come spring.	Wait. Stone-fruit pruning in deep winter invites canker.
<b>February</b>	Best window for heavy structural work and restoration pruning. Through end of month.	Wait. Frost-crack risk still too high.
<b>March</b>	Finish before bud swell. Apples can tolerate later than pears.	Light pruning OK in late March if buds have not broken. Better to wait.
<b>April</b>	Stop. Active growth means open wounds invite fire blight.	Prune at or just before bloom. Wounds close fastest in active growth.
<b>May</b>	No major pruning. Pinch suckers and waterspouts only.	Continue spring pruning if started in April. Stop by month end.
<b>June</b>	Summer pruning OK for size control. Avoid heavy cuts.	Summer pruning OK for size control and fruit thinning.
<b>July</b>	Light summer pruning to slow vigorous growth. Sanitize tools.	Light summer pruning to manage size.
<b>August</b>	Last call for summer pruning. Limit to small cuts.	Avoid heavy cuts. Light shaping only.
<b>September</b>	Stop. Pruning now stimulates growth that will freeze.	Stop. Same reason.
<b>October</b>	Wait for full dormancy.	Wait.
<b>November</b>	Begin if leaves have dropped and weather is settled.	Wait. Cherry and peach prefer late winter.
<b>December</b>	Structural pruning OK once dormant. Avoid hard frosts.	Wait.

**Dates assume a typical Cache Valley year.** A late spring shifts everything back a week or two. A warm February shifts it forward. Watch the tree, not the wall calendar. Buds beginning to swell means stop dormant pruning. Full leaf-out means stop active-growth pruning.

## WHAT NOT TO DO

# Mistakes that take years to undo

## Topping

Cutting back large branches to stubs. Tops the list of arborist malpractice. The tree responds with a forest of weak, vertical regrowth (waterspouts) that snap in wind and rot at the base. If your tree is too tall for its spot, the answer is removal and replanting with a smaller species, not topping.

## Flush cuts

Cutting branches off flush with the trunk, removing the branch collar. The collar is the tissue that lets the tree seal off the wound. Cut it off and you have given fungus a permanent open door. Cut just outside the collar, every time.

## Lion-tailing

Stripping all the small branches off the inside of the canopy, leaving foliage only at the tips. Common in cheap pruning bids because it looks like a lot of work was done. It is structurally terrible. Wind loads the tips, the bare interior limbs have no foliage to feed them, and the limb fails.

## Pruning during fire blight risk

Fire blight is the bacterial disease that turns apple and pear shoots into black shepherd's crooks. It spreads through open wounds. If you see fire blight on your tree, do not prune anywhere on it during active growth unless you sanitize your tools between every cut. We use a 10% bleach solution or 70% isopropyl alcohol, wiped on the blade after every cut. Skip a cut, lose a tree.

## Tool sanitation

Even without fire blight, dirty tools spread disease tree to tree. Sanitize between trees at minimum. Sharp tools matter too: dull blades crush the cambium instead of slicing it, and crushed tissue heals slower.

## WHEN TO CALL US

# If any of this is more than you signed up for

We do fruit-tree pruning across Cache Valley as our most common job. Restoration pruning on neglected orchards is a specialty. We will not top your tree, we will not lion-tail it, and we will tell you honestly if a tree should come out instead.

### Get a quote

Send photos of the trees and a quick description. We will reply the next day, most days. Free, no obligation. [ashandoaktree.com/request-quote](https://ashandoaktree.com/request-quote) or call (801) 541-8457.