

Early training

Choose the shape

The best shape for a fruit tree depends on:

- which season's wood it bears fruit on
- how vigorously it grows
- whether its branches are flexible or stiff
- whether you want a free-standing tree or you want to train it on wires.

It's best to decide on the shape for a new tree right from the start and train it to set up a clear framework. It will be easy to maintain after that. It's harder to correct the shape later on with pruning.

If your new tree has no side branches, cut the main stem back to a healthy-looking bud – side branches will develop below that cut during the next growing season. The height you should make this cut depends on which shape you've chosen (see the next four pages).

Recommended shapes

Citrus

Bush

Stonefruit, fig, persimmon

Free-standing: Vase

On wires: Fan

Apple

Free-standing: Central leader, Vase

On wires: Espalier, Cordon

Pear

Free-standing: Modified central leader

On wires: Espalier, Cordon

When the new shoots grow in spring, choose the strongest ones that are in the position to create the shape you want. Cut off the other shoots for this season, then follow the steps required to create that shape. For all the shapes, remember that upright branches grow more vigorously, and flatter branches are more likely to develop fruiting wood.



Adapted from *Fruit Gardening in NZ*

Vase

The best shape for stonefruits. Several fruiting arms form a 'bowl' that makes it easy to climb into the tree for picking and pruning – this also makes it a popular shape for home-grown apple and pear trees.

How to train

1. Head back the central stem at the level you want the 'bowl' to be.
2. In spring, choose four or five of the strongest shoots that are growing in the directions you want as the main 'leaders'. Shorten them to a healthy bud to force the growth of laterals below that point. Shorten or remove all other shoots for this season.

Maintain the shape

- From then on, remove any shoots that would clutter the centre of the bowl.

Early training

Central leader

The best shape for an apple tree – lets light into the tree to encourage the development of new fruit buds.

Pyramid-shaped, with one central trunk and tiers of fruiting arms starting at about 0.6m above ground level.

How to train

1. Choose four or five branches in an approximate layer at about 0.6m from the ground – they will be the fruiting arms. Make sure they don't all sprout at exactly the same level, as this weakens the tree.
2. Shorten the central stem to about 1m above this tier. New shoots will grow below this cut. Choose one of them to continue as the central stem, and keep four or five that are in the right places to be the next tier of fruiting arms. Cut off the unwanted shoots.
3. During summer, flatten the fruiting arms down a little, to encourage the development of fruit buds – tie the end of the branch to a stake, or just let the fruit weigh the branch down.



4. Repeat this until the tree has reached the height you want.

Maintain the shape

- Each year, cut the central leader back to a weak shoot to keep the tree at the height you want.



Modified central leader

A good shape for controlling the height of vigorous trees such as pear and cherry.

How to train

1. Training starts as for the Central Leader tree, with one central trunk with tiers of fruiting arms.
2. When the top tier of fruiting arms is at about 1.8m from the ground, head back the central stem to a strong outward-growing branch.

Maintain the shape

- Rub off any shoots that grow from the top of the trunk, so the crown stays open.