



Managing trees for the production of fruit

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Ascertaining and maintaining good production of fruit trees requires adequate management. Particular attention should be paid to the consistent pruning of the trees because this affects the light availability in the tree crown with increased light resulting initially in more flower buds that have to be pruned and later on in sweeter fruit of larger size and better color. The different stages throughout the lifecycle of a fruit tree require different pruning regimes. Right before or after planting the fruit tree, the main branch(es) which will constitute the lasting basis of the tree should be selected. Thereby, either 3 - 4 equivalent side branches can be selected and grow while the central leader is suppressed by pruning to approximately the same height as the side branches to create a wide crown. Alternatively, the central branch leader can be selected as a single main branch to create a smaller (and higher) tree. Thereafter, until the start of fruit production, yearly formative pruning is required to shape the tree. When trees start to bear fruit maintenance pruning is conducted to preserve the tree shape and produce sufficient quantities of high-quality fruits. The tree shape with one main (apical) branch generally results in a higher quantity of sweet fruit of better quality when compared to the type with 3-4 main branches where the inner branches often receive less light but the shorter ones are easier to harvest reducing man power needs. Trees of the former type furthermore generally start to bear fruit faster and are more easily to combine with the use of agricultural machinery because of their narrower shape.



Figure 1: Tree-shape with 3 – 4 equivalent branches. Source: Willem Van Colen, Consortium Agroforestry Flanders.

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