

## TRIAL N ERROR ON MIAPPLE FARM – by Peter Cooke

### TREE PRUNING.

#### Prime Pruning and shaping.

The main reason for pruning is usually to control the shape and size of your trees. Traditional fruit orchardists prune small side branches off main leader branches so that strong fruit carrying upward angled and self supporting limbs develop in the traditional wineglass shape.- allowing sun and air access to the middle of the tree. Modern orchardists with semi dwarf varieties will prune towards growing side leaders that grow along growing frames and wires espalier style to simplify picking and allow the sun and air into the tree foliage. The growing frames may be 2 metre high vertical fence frames or Y shaped where they are known as Tatura frames.

At Miapple Farm I follow the wineglass shape but encourage sideways growth off shorter leader branches that will produce new young growth to be cut as scions. I cut the centre branches out of the tree three to four years after planting to encourage new leader branches to develop.

Other scion producers grow their trees on frames at a 45degree angle or espalier them to encourage young vertical growth that will be cut as scions.

While pruning and shaping any dead or diseased branches are removed along with the new growth that always comes back in or towards the centre of the tree.

#### Pruning for pome fruit.

As a general rule an apple or pear tree is lightly pruned in winter for it to produce fruit the next season.

A tree that has suffered broken limbs or has been heavily pruned will not produce much fruit the following season as all of its effort will go into re-growth.

#### Pruning for stone fruit.

While the shaping of a plum, cherry or apricot tree can be similar to an apple, the timing of the pruning is different.

I used to prune my apricot trees when the tree was dormant in winter and for six years the apricots flowered abundantly and grew copious amounts of re-growth in Spring – but the tree never set any fruit.

In desperation I pruned my apricots back heavily at the beginning of autumn while the trees were still full of leaves – a few apricots resulted the next season.

Immediately after picking the apricots in late summer, I pruned the trees more lightly and bucket loads of apricots were produced in the next season.

It was also notable that my cherry crops greatly reduced the season after I cut out the middle of the trees to give them some (wineglass) shape.

#### Cleanliness is important.

All trees are likely to be harbouring a dormant disease or fungal infection that can be transferred to other trees as you proceed to prune your orchard.

I carry a spray bottle containing clean water and 25% ti-tree oil or 50% metholated spirits and I spray my secateurs between trees or at any time that I have cut a branch that may be diseased so that I do not pass on the disease to the next tree.

I use a similar procedure when cutting scions each winter.

It surprises me that some orchardists carefully clean up any fruit that has dropped to

the ground and then put their prunings through a mulching machine and spread it all over their orchard.

At Miapple Farm the prunings are removed for burning in a bonfire come Springtime.

At pruning time my wife Zofia follows me around with a tin of Steritech or Gripcote water soluble bitumen to brush a coat of sealer over any major pruning cuts left on the trees which hopefully prevents entry of disease or fungi through the cuts..

#### Mulching Machine

After many years of carting prunings to the bonfire – we bought a mulcher/schredder. We now schred the prunings through the mulcher and the chips and mulch finish up around the trees in the orchard – a great labour saver – no burning off problems.