

## A few thoughts on plum pruning

### *Thoughts on stone fruit pruning after my first full plum pruning session*

- See also the RHS guidance linked from wiki / fruit & veg maintenance
- Under the RHS categories there our plums - alas - currently have to come under 'Neglected and Overgrown Fruit Trees.'
- RHS on these trees: *"Renovating an old, neglected plum tree should be staged over several years. Aim for a well-balanced tree, keeping the centre of the crown free from shoots to allow good light penetration. Trees respond to larger pruning cuts by sending up a mass of new shoots. Where this happens, the shoots will need to be thinned in the summer to leave just one or two."*
- Start early in the pruning window to minimise the fruit that are on the stems you want to cut. We have been aiming for May-June. The RHS say April is ok.
- Don't be afraid to prune branches with fruit on. It's unavoidable and in a good year we usually have far too many plums to use anyway.
- Just as with top fruit, cut the 3 D's (dead, diseased, damaged) and crossing branches.
- BUT be aware that branches which touch may just be doing so because of the weight of fruit on them.
- Fruit bearing branches will largely be on old growth / old wood. It's tempting to cut new growth back as it seems to be getting in the way of the fruiting branches. But the new growth will bear fruit next year and the year after. Try to find a balance with what you prune.
- Before cutting look below at where the stem will fall. The weight of a stem with fruit on is much more than without. A falling branch may break a lower one as it falls – this happened to me twice on my first full plum pruning session and I then had to take off these lower ones too. Consider making two or more cuts to reduce the weight of what will fall. Or hold the branch to take the weight above your cut/get someone else to hold it if this is possible, though in many cases it isn't.

Lewis