

# A Brief Guide to Pruning Soft Fruit

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**WHY?** The main aim is to remove old less-productive wood to encourage new growth.

There are three main groups: bush fruit (gooseberries and currants), cane fruit (raspberries, blackberries, and all hybrid berries), and vines.

## WHEN?

### Cane Fruit:

- **Summer raspberries & all berries** fruit on year-old wood. Prune immediately after fruiting.
- **Autumn raspberries** fruit on this year's wood. Prune in late winter.

### Bush Fruit:

These crop on wood that is at least a year old, and need constant renewal to ensure heavy crops. Older branches do bear fruit, but quantity and quality decline with age.

**Vines:** Pruning is mainly in winter, with additional pruning to maximise fruit in summer.

## HOW?

### Cane Fruit:

- **Summer raspberries, blackberries and hybrid berries:** Remove old canes to ground level.
- **Autumn raspberries:** prune all canes to just above ground level.

### Bush Fruit:

- These need constant renewal to ensure heavy crops. Fruiting declines on older branches.
- Each year remove about one third of the oldest stems - the bark is very dark to the point of being black - and any that are weak or very low.
- Cut back to ground level or to a strong new shoot.
- Remove Dead, Diseased, Damaged and Crossing (touching) branches. Also remove ones that will touch the ground when in fruit.
- Remove congestion in the centre of the bush to improve airflow and to facilitate harvest (especially for thorny fruit such as gooseberries). Think 'goblet shape'.
- Prune out dead or diseased stems, and any crossing in the centre. Cut back to a young shoot. Thin overcrowded areas and prune drooping stems to an upright side shoot. Shorten new growth by half to maintain an acceptable size.
- The main aim of pruning is to keep the bush healthy and productive: keep the centre open to air and any sunlight, leaving a few main branches.

### Vines:

- **Winter:** Cut back developing main stems by half their new growth and established ones to a single, new bud. Shorten non-flowering laterals (side-branches) to four or five buds and side-shoots growing from these to one or two buds.
- **In summer,** prune laterals carrying flowers to two leaves beyond the first truss and remove any extra trusses.

# A Brief Guide to Maintaining Soft Fruit

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## General

- Always use clean sharp tools.
- Never move from pruning a diseased plant to another plant without thoroughly cleaning tools first. There is cleaning fluid and cloths in the shed.
- If you spot any diseased leaves or branches, email [mrco@googlegroups.com](mailto:mrco@googlegroups.com) to inform other members or tell someone in the core group as soon as possible. These need to be removed and/or treated at the first opportunity.
- Never compost or let lie diseased plant material – please take it home and dispose of through council collections or to the green-waste area at the tip. These are treated at high temperatures to avoid spreading the disease.
- **In early spring:**
  - Remove weeds around the stems.
  - Mulch with a few inches of compost. Ensure it is away from the stems. If we do not have enough well-rotted compost in our compost bays, email [mrco@googlegroups.com](mailto:mrco@googlegroups.com) to inform other members or tell someone in the core group.
  - Then lay cardboard on top of this compost to suppress weeds, retain moisture, and rot down to improve soil structure. Ensure all plastic, labels and metal clips have been removed.
  - Top this with an inch or two of wood chip if it is available. This functions in a similar way to cardboard but is more attractive! It also weighs the cardboard down.
  - Ensure any wires used to attach labels or support branches in previous years is not cutting into bark – remove and re-affix if necessary, using a soft tie (i.e. not bare wire). Leave room for growth, but not such that wind-rock will cause chafing.
- **In summer:**
  - Support new canes if required.
  - Support heavily laden branches.
  - Water during very dry periods.
  - As fruit ripens, protect bushes from birds by wrapping netting around them.

## Special Note regarding Gooseberries

- As these are thorny, remove any prunings to the bramble heap below the top path – PLEASE do NOT put them on the compost heap or leave them lying around.
- In late winter: rake the soil around stem to expose any capsid bugs or saw fly to the birds.
- In Spring & summer:
  - Check for sawfly caterpillars, especially beneath leaves. Remove them by hand.
  - Remove suckers as they appear - very carefully tear them off by hand if possible since gooseberries can regenerate from pruning cuts.

