Pruning Vertical Axis 2013

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Many of you have now started pruning the older hardier varieties by shortening them, removing poor scaffolds and reducing the amount of suckers present. With the consistently colder weather we can now start on established plantings and more sensitive varieties. Most of the pruning from now on will be using the principles developed for the Vertical Axis System (518–642 trees/acre). Remember that this system consists of a permanent bottom tier or 3-4 scaffolds with every limb in the tree completely renewable. Here are some tips:

(1) Reduce the bottom permanent tier to 3-4 limbs arranged in an X pattern angling from the tree not straight into the row. Limbs can be redirected by selecting a side branch that is more in the direction you wish the limb to go.

(2) Cingulate all limbs so that there are no large side branches coming off the main limbs. This includes removing forks at the end of each remaining limb.

(3) Remove all vigorous upright shoots and all weak down facing shoots from each branch. This should create a limb with all shoots nearly parallel to the ground.

(4) Vigorous large fruited varieties can be pruned so that the tips of these shoots face downward, weaker and small fruited varieties should be undercut so that each branch tip is more upright.

(5) Limit large branch removal to 3-4 cuts. Any limb that is more than ½ the diameter of the trunk where it inserts is a candidate for removal. Remember to use a “bevel cut”! If you have more branches than need to be removed than the number of cuts allowed, favor large branches on the east and west side of the tree for removal.
(6) Finally decide how tall the tree should be and reduce the tree’s height. Consider light interception and spray coverage when determining tree height. Trees should be no taller than 90% of the between row spacing. Always cut to an upright shoot near the center of the tree and remove side shoots that may contribute to excess shading and/or crop load in this portion of the tree.

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