



Growing Pears In Florida¹

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Pears are satisfactory fruit for the home orchard. Some pears are adapted and produce in abundance, while others do not thrive in the warm climate of Florida. Cultivars that grow quite well throughout north Florida may not be adapted in central Florida. Floradahome, Hood, and Pineapple are the only cultivars recommended for trial south of Gainesville to Orlando.

CULTIVARS

Success in growing pears depends on horticultural skill and on proper choice of variety. Some pears which are generally satisfactory for Florida include the fire blight resistant varieties listed in Table 1.

PROPAGATION, PLANTING, AND POLLINATION

Pear cultivars are not true to type when grown from seed. Therefore, it is recommended that growers obtain known cultivars grafted on suitable rootstocks.

For a home orchard, pear trees can be planted on a variety of soil types. However, they grow best in a fertile, sandy loam soil with deep internal drainage. If possible, select a site which allows good air drainage to reduce possible damage from spring frosts.

Table 1. Fire blight resistant varieties of pears.

Cultivar	Area	Flowering	Use
Baldwin	North	Late	Fresh and Canning
Carnes	North	Late	Canning
Flordahome	North and Central	Early	Fresh and Canning
Hood	North and Central	Early	Fresh and Canning
Kieffer	North	Late	Canning
Orient	North	Late	Canning
Pineapple	North and Central	Early	Canning
Tenn	North	Late	Fresh and Canning

Plant healthy one or two year old trees directly from the nursery without allowing the roots to dry out. Pear trees may be planted anytime during the dormant season, but the period from late December through January is best because it allows time for the roots to become established before spring growth commences. Trees planted late in the spring may die during the dry periods which often follow.

The planting hole should be dug large enough so the root system is neither crowded, bent, nor broken (Figure 1). All extra long or broken roots should be pruned before planting. Plants should be placed

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upright and at the same depth they stood in the nursery. Put in one or two shovels full of soil and pack it firmly around the roots. Repeat this procedure until the hole is full of soil and the plant is firmly in place.

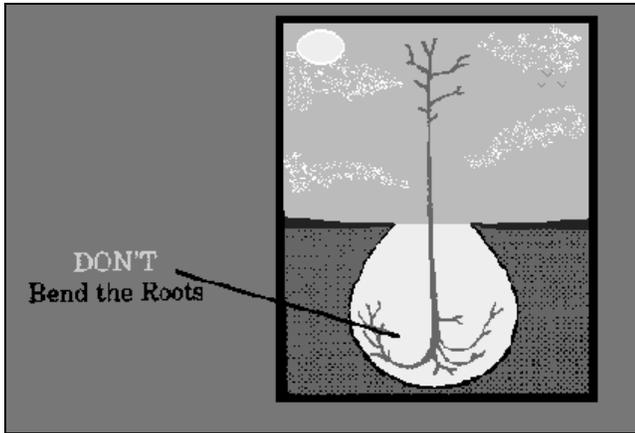


Figure 1. Don't bend the roots.

It is desirable to add water when the hole is about two thirds filled with soil in order to settle the soil around the roots. After the water has soaked into the soil, finish filling the hole. Leave a ridge around the edge of the hole to form a water reservoir (Figure 2). Fertilizer should not be placed directly in the hole at planting time.

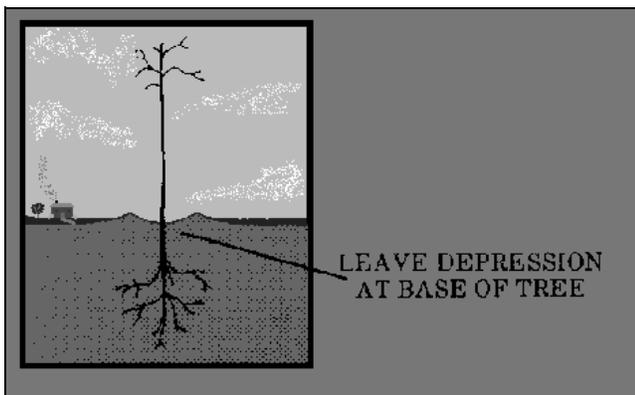


Figure 2. Leave depression at base of tree.

Most pear cultivars adapted to Florida may be grown as solid blocks (only one variety per block). However, Flordahome and Pineapple require cross-pollination and should be interplanted with each other or with Hood, as these three cultivars tend to bloom together.

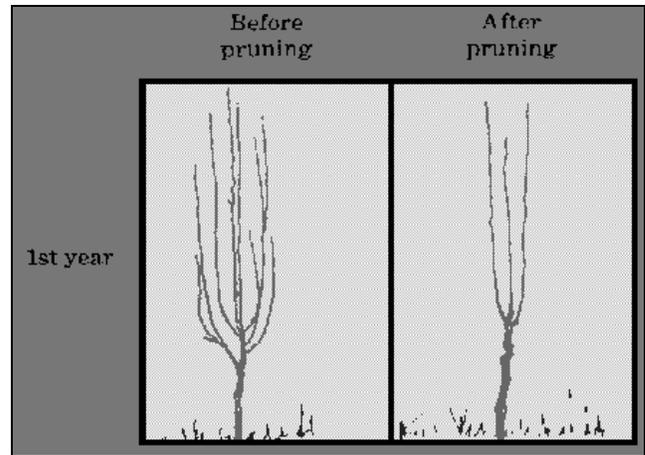


Figure 3. First Year Pruning, before and after.

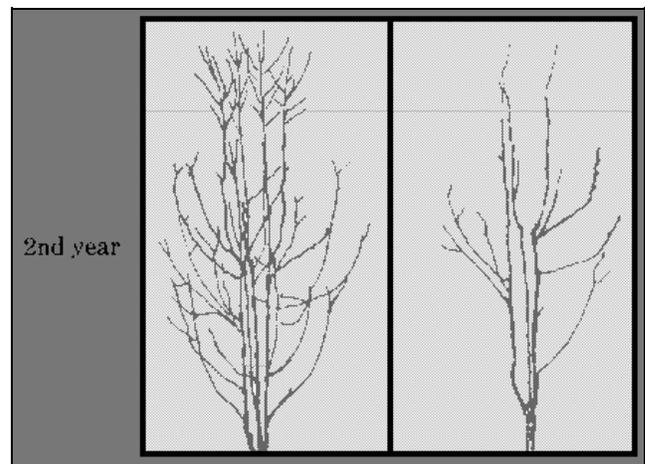


Figure 4. Second Year Pruning, before and after.

TRAINING AND PRUNING

Pears are pruned for two purposes: to remove diseased or dead wood and to train or shape the tree. Most pears tend to grow upright, thereby causing the fruit to be difficult to pick even with the aid of a ladder. Pruning to a modified leader system (Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5) helps open the center and encourages the tree to spread. Increased vigor from excessive pruning may accentuate fire blight.

CULTIVATION

Cultivation is necessary only for weed control and should be as shallow as possible to avoid damage to the root system. Maintain a weed-free area approximately two feet from the tree trunk by hoeing. In general, chemical weed killers are not practical to use around the home, but mulches may be used to control weeds and conserve moisture.

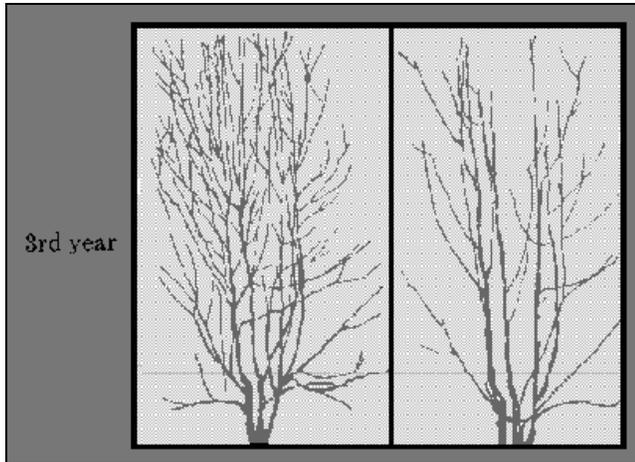


Figure 5. Third Year Pruning, before and after.

FERTILIZATION

Precise fertilizer requirements are largely unknown. A balanced fertilizer as 6-6-6, 8-8-8, or similar mixture is recommended. About 1 pound for each year of age of the tree is usually sufficient until a maximum of 10 pounds is reached. This should be applied in two applications, during dormancy (January) and at the beginning of the rainy season (June). The fertilizer should be broadcast under the trees. Excessive fertilization should be avoided as it may make the tree more susceptible to fire blight. Do not fertilize at planting.

IRRIGATION

Rainfall varies in frequency and amount giving wet and dry periods. How much water and when to apply it depends not only on rainfall but also on the soil type. Sandy soils require more frequent irrigation than do soils rich in clay or organic material. Thoroughly wet all areas under the canopy of the tree to a depth of several feet. This may require upwards of 50 gallons per tree for large specimens or as little as 5-10 gallons for young trees. Applications every 7-10 days may be needed in extremely dry seasons.

HARVESTING AND STORAGE

In general, pears ripen satisfactorily in storage at room temperature. Wrapping the pears in paper before storing will result in better ripening. The fruit should be picked when full size is obtained and yellow color begins to show. This premature harvest allows ripening without full development of the stone cells which give the fruit a gritty texture. Fruit ripening on

the tree is often unsatisfactory due to unevenness in maturity and decay problems.

PEST CONTROL

Preventive control of pests is required to maintain beautiful foliage and good fruit quality.

Leaf Spot (*Fabraea maculata*): Pear leaf spot can cause serious defoliation on some varieties unless control measures are practiced.

Fire Blight (*Erwinia amylovora*): Fire blight spreads from tree to tree primarily during the bloom period. Where infection is already present, or occurs later, the infected areas should be pruned out, cutting at least 8 or 10 inches below the lowest visible infection. Pruned-off parts should be burned.

Also suckers, sprouts and dead wood which harbor fire blight bacteria should be removed. Lower rates of nitrogen fertilizer will result in lower tree vigor and lower incidences of fire blight.

Scale Insects: Several scale insects may infest the leaves, twigs, branches or fruits of the pear. Contact your county Cooperative Extension Service office for current pest control recommendations.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. Do not over-fertilize.
2. Prune for shape and disease control.
3. A preventive spray program is a must for good quality.
4. Pears should be picked just before ripening, wrapped in paper, and stored at room temperature for uniform ripening.