

GARDENING

AND STILL SOME MORE about pruning. Firstly about apples. We grow apples on trees of various shapes, on bushes and cordons and, at Wisley, you will see them growing just above the ground. I want to advise you generally. Having fashioned our tree, bush, cordon or whatever to the shape we require we must then concentrate on the production of fruit. We do this by spur pruning between now and the end of February. The short one year growth, the spur, will carry a number of buds. Prune back this spur to about three buds but always to an outgrowing bud. At the same time cut out any cankerous growth so that the tree is "clean". Then, using the correct precautions, give the trees or bushes a thorough spraying with a tar oil wash. The same method may be used for pears.

The young growth on plums and cherries should be stopped in June by pinching back to four leaves using finger and thumb, this method being recommended as cutting with a knife or secateurs frequently causes "gumming". Shortening the growth from these pinched back shoots should be done in winter so that fruit buds may form.

We dealt with red and black currants and gooseberries in a recent issue but here is a reminder, and that is to keep the bushes open.

How about strawberries? They are really worthwhile, easy to grow and delicious to eat. Very often they are the most profitable crop in the garden. Your bed needs to be ready for planting in the summer. You need a sunny spot and well prepared ground that has been thoroughly cleaned.

It is not always easy to buy strawberry plants on the market so try and find a neighbour who can help you with either divisions or rooted runners. Plant in the summer so that your bed will be productive in the following year. Remember that blackbirds, mice and voracious squirrels also like strawberries, so take precautions.

If you are going to grow raspberries, loganberries or blackberries, you will need wires for support. The canes for summer fruiting raspberries which will be about five feet long should be planted about four inches apart. Loganberries and blackberries need space. Plant them about three feet apart and tie well into the wires. When they have fruited cut back hard.

Provided you have a warm corner, figs are a possibility. And, believe me, freshly picked ripe figs are delicious. Find a fig tree – there are many around. Beg a rooted growth from around the stump and plant this in your warm corner. When it starts growing, stop the shoots at four leaves and, as further growth appears, stop that too at four leaves and so on until you have a nice shapely fig bush, which, provided it is not demolished by frost, will give you fruit for many years.

Fruit growing has many complications and different schools of thought and in one page I can do little more than whet your appetite. My priority would be strawberries!

Good gardening – spring is not far away.

A V Mitchell