

Establishing & Caring for Espalier Fruit Trees

Presented by Meg Cowden for the Minnesota Horticultural Society

In this class, you will learn how espalier creates functional, edible art on your landscape. We will cover how to train them, what types of fruit trees are best for beginners, and how you establish the shape of your espalier trees to promote fruiting spurs.

What is Espalier

A beautiful training method for trees and shrubs, providing visual interest through structural support and bending of branches as they grow and mature. Apple and pear trees are the most common types of espalier fruit trees though redcurrants and even non-edible shrubs and trees can be trained in this method in formal settings.

How to Train

Structure is key

Choose the right tree for your space

Do your research the season ahead, install trellis sized appropriately for the root stock you are growing ahead of receiving the tree the following spring.

Materials:

Thick stretch non-adhesive plant tie tape is most commonly used for training – it stretches with the branch so never girdles the tender stem.

Pruners: Okatsune hand pruners

Rubbing alcohol or other disinfectant for cleaning off pruners

Best Practices:

Winter pruning for structure, summer pruning for water sprouts

Good hygiene between trees to prevent spreading disease

Learn by doing – this is an acquired art. Have fun, take chances, and let the trees teach you

Best Fruit for Espaliering:

Apples are the best place to start

Plums are delightfully quick and forgiving

Espalier trees will bear fruit one or more years later than open grown trees, so be patient

Further Reading/Resources:

Fruiting Espaliers: A Fusion of Art and Science by Lee Reich

The Lorette System of Pruning by Louis Lorette

Sourcing Bare Root Stock:

Cummins Nursery

Stark Bros

Orange Pippin

One Green World