



Espaliering Apricots and Plums

We continuously receive enquiries about the possibility of espaliering stone fruit i.e. apricots and plums, and my reply is that they are far too vigorous but there aren't any satisfactory dwarfing root stocks available for apricots and plums as there are for apples and pears. To try and contain a 4 metre apricot tree at a 2 metre height will only force it to keep making lots of vegetative growth instead of putting it's efforts into flowers and fruit - the old pruning cycle of cutting back hard and lots of branches growing in response.

There is however a huge apricot orchard being established here in Tasmania and they are growing their trees in a modified sort of espalier system, and with excellent results. The trellis isn't just wires, but a big open fence wire like ring-lock which starts at about 70cm from the ground up to a height of about 3 metres. The apricot trees are grown loosely on these wires. The branches are grown in an open V form rather than kept exactly horizontal. Both plums and apricots have brittle branches - especially apricots and especially when laden with lots of fruit. Tying the branches to the wires gives the trees the necessary support - it's heartbreaking to see whole branches laden with fruit broken off. Any shoots or branches that try to grow out and away from the wires are nipped out or woven back into the wire framework making a two dimensional tree. The older trees are already growing into each other from about 2.5 - 3 metres apart, so that in winter when the trees are bare of leaves one can cut away the shoots that are rubbing against each other. On apricots especially it's good to seal up larger pruning cuts with a copper based paint or slurry. They're notorious to get fungous infections in any open cuts.

This two dimensional growing method gives you and sunshine good access to all parts of the tree. There are no dead parts inside the tree so more trees can be grown in a given area. It works well also against a wall or fence and as part of a vegetable garden. There are lots of ties available in hardware shops but ordinary sisal string or even better, use a piece of Italian Tying Willow growing in your garden. Don't tie the branches too tightly as it can cut into the stem as the tree grows and expands. Broken ties can be replaced in winter.

Over fertilizing and over watering can make for excessively vigorous growth. Keep both to an adequate minimum and stop feeding after the fruit is off. Plums and apricots can handle hot dry summers. Quinces grow well like this also. If you have bird problems (who doesn't!) this is also very convenient for netting. A final touch is a guard for the trunk, to protect from rabbits.

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