# PLUMS, GAGES, DAMSONS ....../ CHERRY PLUMS

## TREE FORMS

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In the more favourable areas of the British Isles plums can be grown as bush, Minarette or pyramid trees but in the colder regions they are best grown as oblique cordons or as a fan on a warm south, south-west or south-east facing wall or fence. The best flavoured and late season plums and gages such as 'Coe's Golden Drop' and 'Cambridge Gage' are best grown as a fan on a warm wall or fence, even in the warmer regions. Minarettes and pyramids are a better form for the garden than bushes since their low angled branches are less liable to break and they are easier to pick, prune, spray and net. They also occupy less space than a bush tree. Damsons make particularly good pyramids.

## THE TIME FOR PRUNING

Stone fruits (plums, gages, damsons, cherries, peaches, nectarines, apricots and sweet almonds) should not be pruned during the dormant season because of the risk of silver leaf and bacterial canker infection. For this reason pruning after planting is delayed until April to June. All pruning cuts in the initial training should be protected with a wound paint.

## **PRUNING & TRAINING OF BUSHES**

Plums grown on St. Julien 'A' rootstock will make a bush 3.6-4.5m (12-15ft) in height and spread and need to be spaced 3.6-4.5m (12-15ft) apartÈ

#### INITIAL TRAINING

The formative pruning is much the same as for the apple for the first two to three years but should be carried out in April (click here to view). They are normally grown on a slightly longer leg than apples; in the first year the main stem should be pruned to a bud or well-placed lateral at about 90cm (3ft) from ground level.

If it is a feathered maiden, the main stem should be pruned back to leave three or four good side shoots at about 90cm (3ft) from the ground. Shorten these side shoots by two thirds of their length to an outward-facing bud and remove any shoots lower down on the main stem.

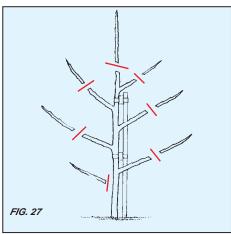
### PRUNING OF THE CROPPING TREE

Pruning of the cropping tree is lighter than for apples and pears. In April, crossing, crowding, dead, diseased and broken branches are removed as necessary. A plum can tolerate a more crowded head than apples and pears.

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## **PRUNING & TRAINING OF PYRAMIDS**

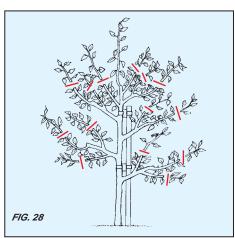
A pyramid plum on St. Julien 'A' rootstock will grow to 2.4-2.7m (8-9ft) and should be spaced 3-3.6m (10-12ft) apart. A pyramid on Pixy rootstock will grow to 1.8-2.1m (6-7ft) and should be spaced 2.4-3m (8-10ft) apart. Trees should be staked for the first five years using a 2.4m (8ft) stake driven 60cm (2ft) into the ground.

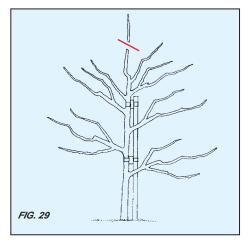


#### INITIAL TRAINING

Prune the main stem to a good bud at about 1.2m (4ft) from ground level for St Julien 'A' Remove any feathers (side shoots) within 45cm (18in) of the ground and shorten the rest to half their length to a downward facing bud. In the summer the central leader should be tied to the stake but not pruned (see fig. 27).

In late July the young current season's shoots should be pruned by shortening the branch leaders to 20cm (8in) to a downward facing bud (see fig. 28) and branch laterals to 15cm (6in).

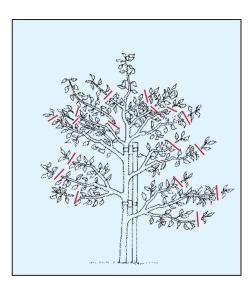




Each April the central leader's previous summer's growth should be cut back by two thirds until it has reached the desired height (see fig. 29).

If the side branches are not growing at a very low angle they should be tied down to 30° above the horizontal in late July. They can be tied to pegs in the ground, or to the stake, or even weighted bags can be used. This is particularly suitable for the side branches of

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vigorous varieties such as 'Marjorie's Seedling' as well as for upright side-branch growth at the top of the tree but not the central leader. The strings can be removed once the branches have set in position in late autumn. The aim should be to achieve a weeping habit to the tree as far as possible.

#### PRUNING IN SUBSEQUENT YEARS

Once the desired height has been reached, the central leader should be pruned to 2.5cm (1in) in May. In late June, any vertical shoots competing with the central leader are removed. In late July the current season's growth should be pruned by shortening the branch leaders to 20cm (8in) to a downward facing bud (see fig. 30) and laterals to 15cm (6in).

#### PRUNING & TRAINING OF CORDONS

Unlike Minarettes, cordons may need some initial pruning and training. Cordons should be planted at an angle of around 45° with the scion uppermost and should be spaced 75cm-90cm (2½-3ft) apart (see page 27). They are trained to canes fixed to horizontal wires 60cm (2ft) apart (three wires for a 1.8m [6ft] fence). They should ideally be orientated north-south. The trees should be planted with the top of each cordon inclined towards the north so the sun reaches all along their length. If an east-west orientation is unavoidable the cordons should be inclined towards the east.

Pruning should be delayed until March or April when the leading shoot should be pruned by one third to a suitable bud and any side shoots greater than 15cm (6in) in length should be pruned to three or four buds. Formative pruning is largely the same as for Minarettes.

## **FRUIT THINNING**

If there is a heavy crop, the fruits should be thinned when they are about hazelnut size and again when they are twice that size. Small, misshapen and diseased fruits should be removed to leave the rest 5-7.5cm (2-3in) apart or 10cm (4in) apart for large fruited varieties.

## **HARVESTING & STORAGE**

Plums should be picked when fully coloured and ripe, at which stage they part easily from the spur. It will be necessary to pick over the tree several times, as not all the fruit ripens at once. Fruit for bottling, jam or cooking should be picked when slightly under ripe but dessert fruit should be fully ripe. Most plums will not keep long and are best used straightaway. But some late plums can be stored; the variety •Coe•sGolden Drop• will keep up to a month if stored in a cool, dark place.

#### **MANURING**

In early February each year, broadcast over the rooting area:

15g/m2(1/2oz/yd2) of sulphate of potash, and 50g/m2 (1 3/4oz/yd2) of sulphate of ammonia or Nitro-Chalk (calcium ammonium nitrate);

and every third year: 70g/m2 (2 1/2oz/yd2) of superphosphate.

Alternatively, a compound fertilizer may be used annually following the manufacturer•s recommendations. The 'Ken Muir 'Fruit Tree, Cane, Vine & Bush Feed' is ideal for this.

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