

Things to Think About When Training and Pruning Sweet Cherries on Gisela Rootstocks

Greg Lang, Bill Shane, Nikki Rothwell, & Jim Nugent, Michigan State University

Year 1 – Focus on establishing a strong root & leader system

- Provide consistent, regular irrigation (e.g., double drip irrigation lines) and fertilization (fertigation is particularly good) to promote and maintain growth activity of leader(s)
- Do not head if establishing a central leader (or slender spindle or vertical axe)
- Head above strong, well-distributed buds if establishing multiple leaders
- If scaffolds will be selected from this year's lateral shoots, then use clothespins when shoots are 4-5" long to establish wide crotch angles

Year 2 – Focus on initiating well-distributed lateral shoots

- Choose 3-4 scaffolds with wide crotch angles or remove all side shoots saving a bud at the base of the removed shoots that are not too close to the ground
- Use bud selection and bud removal to achieve well distributed shoots; shoots that develop are relatively strong
- Apply copper after debudding
- The greater the number of lateral shoots that can be initiated, the more balanced the resulting growth
- Use of clothespins when shoots are 4-5" long to fix wide crotch angles
- Maintain enough vigor to obtain 24 to 36" of growth for each lateral shoot

Year 3 – Focus on balancing future fruiting spurs, leaf area, and vigor

- Remove weak lateral shoots by thinning cuts or stubbing (to re-grow); remove (or cut to a bottom basal bud) any unbalanced vigorous growth in the tops of leaders
- Reduce the length of laterals (future fruiting wood) by heading-cut removal of 25 to 33% of each future fruiting shoot; this strengthens the future fruiting wood structure and removes closely-formed spurs (thus, future dense flower clusters) in the terminal section of shoot, as well as stimulates terminal branching to add leaf area

Pruning tips

- Prune in spring to invigorate, prune after harvest (late July to late August) to moderate vigor and improve light distribution
- Prune when dry weather is forecast
- Leave pruning stubs if bacterial canker is a problem