**Rejuvenating Old Fruit Trees**

(Consolidation of concepts from ag pamphlets on the subject by Mike Chase)

1. **Dormant Season Cuts**

**Observe Law of Thirds**

Determine how much you want to remove (how much you want to shorten the tree to remove a secondary canopy) and split the removal into thirds. Remove 1/3 the first dormant season, another 1/3 the second dormant season, and the final 1/3 in the third dormant season.

**Cut to New Dominant Limb**

Don’t create any stubs when making cuts. When cutting back a large limb, select a lateral limb (this lateral will usually be much smaller than the large limb being cut) that will take on the role as the new “growth point” to replace apically dominant limb section that has been removed.

**Don’t apply sealant**

Research by horticulturalist has determined that sealing cuts does more harm than good. Note that cuts should be slanted so that water runs off of all cuts.

1. **Cultural Practices**

**Maintain Adequate Soil Moisture**

All trees need a consistent watering routine to thrive.

**Apply Compost**

Apply compost clear out to the drip line of the tree and renew yearly. Do not use commercial fertilizer because that generally produces excessive vegetative growth after major dormant pruning.

**Control Pests and Diseases**

Use Michael Phillips’ *The Holistic Orchard* as a guide to controlling the pests and diseases.

1. **Follow-up Summer Pruning**

Dormant season pruning to rejuvenate old/neglected trees will usually lead to excessive vegetative growth that needs attention during the summer. Starting in late May the new growth can be (a) removed (e.g., water sprouts), (b) redirected through the use of spacers or twine, or (c) cut back to reduce length of new shoots and cause side shoots to develop. To learn more about summer pruning principles look closely at the color illustrations in Richard Bird’s *Pruning Fruiting Plants* or *How To Prune Fruiting Plants.* Additional summer pruning can be done in mid July and August, especially if you are trying to create fruiting spurs like those illustrated in the Bird pruning books. Don’t prune after the end of August because you want any new growth the trees make to harden off prior to freezing weather.