

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 active growth 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; use clothespins when shoots are 4-5” long to establish wide crotch angles

Year 2 – Focus on initiating well-distributed lateral shoots

- Select 1) 3 to 5 multiple leaders, or 2) first (lowest) tier of suitable scaffolds if present, or 3) remove all side shoots from central leader by cutting to a bud at the base of the removed shoot
- Use bud selection and bud removal at budswell to promote and distribute lateral shoots for future fruiting; resulting shoots are relatively strong; apply copper before or after
- Alternatively, use Promalin (only when warm temperatures are predicted) at bud greentip to promote and distribute lateral shoots for future fruiting; resulting shoots are relatively weak
- Alternatively, use scoring only when dry conditions are predicted; apply copper before or after
- The greater the number of lateral shoots that can be initiated, the more balanced the resulting growth distributed along the leader(s)
- Use clothespins when shoots are 4-5” long to establish 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

- Before budbreak, 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 (Year 3 onwards)
- Summer prune (e.g. August) to control any excessive growth, especially of the leader(s) and upper laterals, and to improve light distribution throughout the canopy for development of strong spur buds (Year 3 onwards)

Pruning tips

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