

# Growers Learn New Pruning Methods At Franklin County Field Day

**DAVE LEFEVER**  
*Lancaster Farming Staff*  
**WAYNESBORO** (Franklin Co.) — For tree fruit growers, pruning can be as much of an art as a science. While accepting some gen-

eral pruning guidelines, seasoned experts usually combine them with their own unique approach to the job. "If you put 50 horticulturalists together (for a pruning demonstration), the trees

would not look the same," said Rob Crassweller of Penn State's horticulture department.

Crassweller joined local fruit growers for a March hands-on pruning field day at the Paul Hess farm north of Waynesboro. About 20 people participated in the workshop, featuring Gala apple and Baby Gold peach trees.

Crassweller demonstrated an apple tree pruning technique relatively new to the region. Called the "vertical axe" or "French axe," the goal is to simplify and reduce the amount of labor involved in pruning.

One of the principles of this method is to avoid cutting off the top of the tree — the central leader — in favor of letting it "go its natural way," Crassweller said. Traditionally, apple growers have topped the central leader to limit its growth and invigorate lateral growth. But that makes for more pruning work in subsequent years to thin out new shoots that grow as a result of the cut.

"Once you make that cut, you always have to fight (the increased number of shoots)," Crassweller said. A top cut might result in three new shoots the following year and increase to six or seven



Rob Crassweller of the Penn State Horticulture Department demonstrates pruning on a Baby Gold peach tree. Paul Hess of Paul's Country's Market is in the background.



Penn State plant pathologist Jim Travis points out canker on a peach tree. Pruning helps to prevent this fungal disease by increasing sunlight and air exposure to the branches. The Kauffman peach trees have few problems with canker.

shoots the year after, he noted.

In the French axe method, the weight and numbers of fruit growing on the central leader serve to limit its

upward growth and encourage lateral branching.

Another characteristic of the French axe method is that larger branches are pruned

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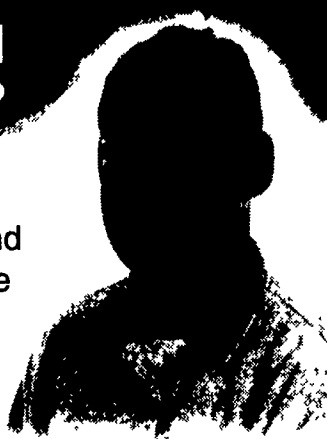
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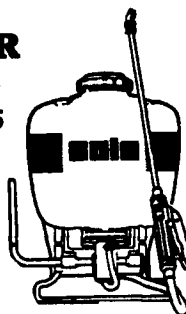
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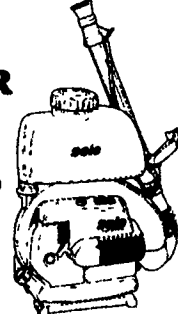
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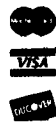


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