

# Debudding Sweet Cherry

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Debudding is a technique that can be used successfully to help with sweet cherry tree training. It causes lateral limbs to form on the central leader over a greater distance and generally with wider crotch angles than normal. This is particularly useful to overcome the tendency in sweet cherries to produce relatively few laterals, all generally within about 8" of the terminal and the uppermost generally with narrow crotch angles.

Remove all but the terminal bud from the top 3-5", then remove 50% to 67% of the remaining buds on last year's terminal growth. That is, remove either every other bud or every two out of three. Use the higher bud removal rate when terminal length is over 30" or so. The result is that many buds produce laterals and these laterals are spread over a much larger area of the leader.

Because of the tendency of sweets to produce laterals only from buds near the terminal, without debudding it has been necessary to head the leader about 8" above the height of desired scaffolds. With debudding, leaders can often be left unheaded and still get limbs to form 2 to 3 feet below the terminal. If terminal growth is greater than 2 1/2 to 3 feet above the desired height of the lowest scaffold, then consider using a combination of heading and debudding.

Debudding is a technique that will work particularly well in the spring of year two on trees that do not have adequate limbs (at the proper height with wide crotch angles) to select as potential scaffolds, so the tree is to be taken back to a "nub whip". However, even when 2-3 scaffolds are saved at this time, so that 1-3 more scaffolds are desired, this technique can be used to produce limbs that are better spread along the leader to improve the likelihood of getting the desired limbs in good locations. Debudding is particularly advantageous for growing dwarf sweet cherries because of the importance of developing fruit limbs up the central leader. In dwarf plantings, it is suggested for use on the terminal leader growth both in year two and year three of the orchard.

Debudding could also be used on newly planted trees following whipping to produce limbs over a greater distance on the leader. This is generally not advantageous if trees are to be mechanically harvested, as low limbs must be removed anyway. However, debudding newly planted trees may be advantageous when growing trees to be hand harvested where scaffolds are desired at a lower level if adequate numbers of buds are present.

Debudding is best accomplished after bud swell and before shoot growth begins. At this time buds remove very easily. If done during dormant season, the buds are much more difficult to remove. If done after shoot growth begins, the desired response of lower buds to form shoots will be reduced.

Debudding may leave good sites for bacterial canker (*Pseudomonas sp.*) infection. If in an area where this is a concern, apply copper at recommended rates immediately after debudding.

**Please send any comments or suggestions regarding this site to:**

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