

HOW TO TRAIN ESPALIER PLANTS



Follow our step-by-step instructions on how to train espalier plants. Learn the basics of espalier training, choosing the right plants, and creating an espalier pattern. Get tips on maintaining your espalier plants and keeping them healthy and thriving. Discover the beauty and versatility of espalier plants and how to use them to create stunning displays in your garden.

WHAT IS AN ESPALIER?

An espalier is a clever horticultural technique that offers a wonderful solution for cultivating fruit trees within limited garden spaces. Beyond its practical fruit-bearing capacity, it serves as an ingenious means of ensuring privacy, acting as a windbreak, or concealing unsightly walls, fences, or views. While espalier trees demand more care than conventional trees, their ability to minimise spatial requirements and reduce shading sets them apart. These trees' streamlined, flat architecture simplifies fruit harvesting and offers an aesthetically pleasing aspect to your garden.

The term 'espalier,' originating from French, initially referred to the supportive framework against which trees or plants were meticulously trained. Over time, its definition has expanded to encompass both the framework and the plants. Essentially, any tree that's artfully trained to grow horizontally against a wall, fence, or supporting structure can be called an espalier tree.

Where to Position an Espalier Screen?

Strategic positioning plays a crucial role in the successful cultivation of espalier fruit trees, whether a single tree or multiple ones. When situating them against a wall or fence, the orientation of these structures becomes a pivotal factor in determining the viability of the fruits you can cultivate. Structures facing south or west bask in more sunlight, broadening the spectrum of fruit trees suitable for this method. However, it's worth noting that fruit tree varieties are well-suited for the relatively shaded east-facing or even north-facing walls.

Moreover, the versatility of espalier fruit trees extends beyond the periphery of your garden. Using a trellis as support, you can cultivate espalier screens to demarcate distinct sections within your garden elegantly. For instance, they can effectively conceal recycling bins, offer a cocoon of privacy for a patio or seating area, or even establish a sequence of enchanting garden chambers.

Concerns about an espalier screen diminishing the perceived size of your garden can be counterintuitive. In fact, skilful placement can create an illusion of spaciousness. To maximise this effect, consider potential shading effects and ensure the screen's presence won't detrimentally affect the growth of other existing and future plants.



Choosing the Right Plants

While numerous espalier trees thrive in the UK and can be trained against walls, trellises, or fences, the key lies in making astute plant choices tailored to your specific location, especially when aiming to craft an espalier screen. For a harmoniously integrated screen of trees, it's advisable to space your chosen trees at approximately 3 meters apart.

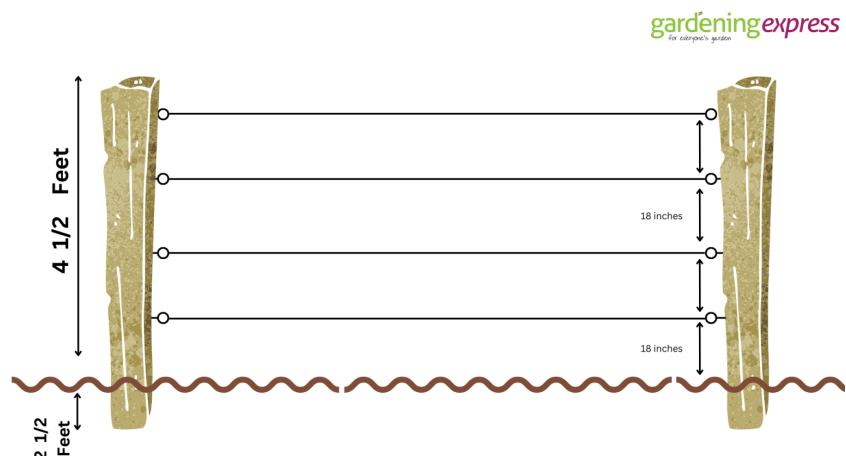
Guide to Making Your Own

Consider espaliering fruit trees if you want to enhance your garden with a captivating and functional feature. While this process requires patience and time, the end result is highly rewarding. Follow these comprehensive steps to successfully train your fruit trees into beautiful, espalier shapes.

1: Prepare the Support Structure

1. Select a suitable trellis or support structure for your espaliered tree. Ensure it has at least three evenly spaced horizontal tiers to accommodate the lateral branches that will grow outwards from the central trunk.
2. Secure the trellis using 7-foot-long 4×4 posts spaced 8 feet apart for stability. Sink the posts 2½ feet deep into the ground and compact the soil around them.
3. Install 4-inch-long eyebolts in the posts at regular intervals: 18 inches from the ground, 36 inches, and 54 inches. Maintain a 2-inch-wide space between the wooden post and the eyebolt. This space allows for the growth of your tree's branches.
4. Thread 12-gauge wire through the openings of the eyebolts and tighten. Use turnbuckles at the end of each run to account for wire stretch. Each wire corresponds to a future branch's path. You can adjust the setup to create two, three, or four-armed espaliers.

5. Consider your own height when determining the desired height of the tree. Keeping it manageable will eliminate the need for ladders during maintenance and harvest.



2: Select and Plant Your Tree

Purchase a young bare-root fruit tree on semi-dwarf rootstock in late autumn or early spring. Trees on standard rootstock tend to be too vigorous for espaliering.

Plant the tree in the centre between the trellis posts. Position it so that its branches align with the wires you've strung.

Remove any branches that do not align with the wires. If the tree has no branches, wait for them to grow and tie or prune them as needed. Tie branches to the wires using nursery tape, leaving the tips of the branches free to grow upward. This encourages branch growth.

3: Prune and Maintain Your Espalier

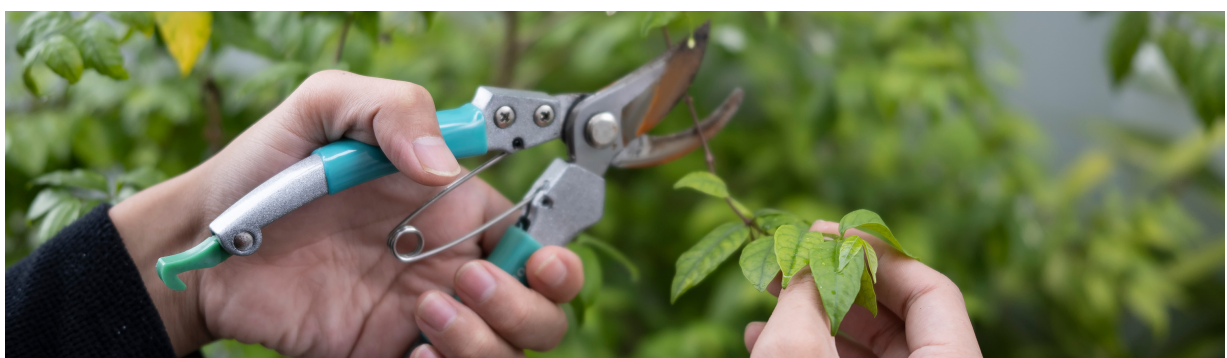
In summer, the buds on the outstretched branches will begin growing upward. During mid-summer, prune these stems to leave only two or three buds, creating spurs that will bear fruit for years.

Tie stretching branches to the wire to control their development until they reach the ideal length. Tie the tips flush with the wire or bend them downward to slow growth.

Trim any spurs growing downward to prevent fruit production that could weigh down the branches. Cut the highest point of the tree to be 2 to 3 inches more limited than the highest wire.

Your tree should begin proving to be fruitful by the second or third year. Thin the fruit clusters in early summer, leaving only one fruit per cluster.

Loosen ties annually to prevent branches from becoming girdled.



Additional Tips:

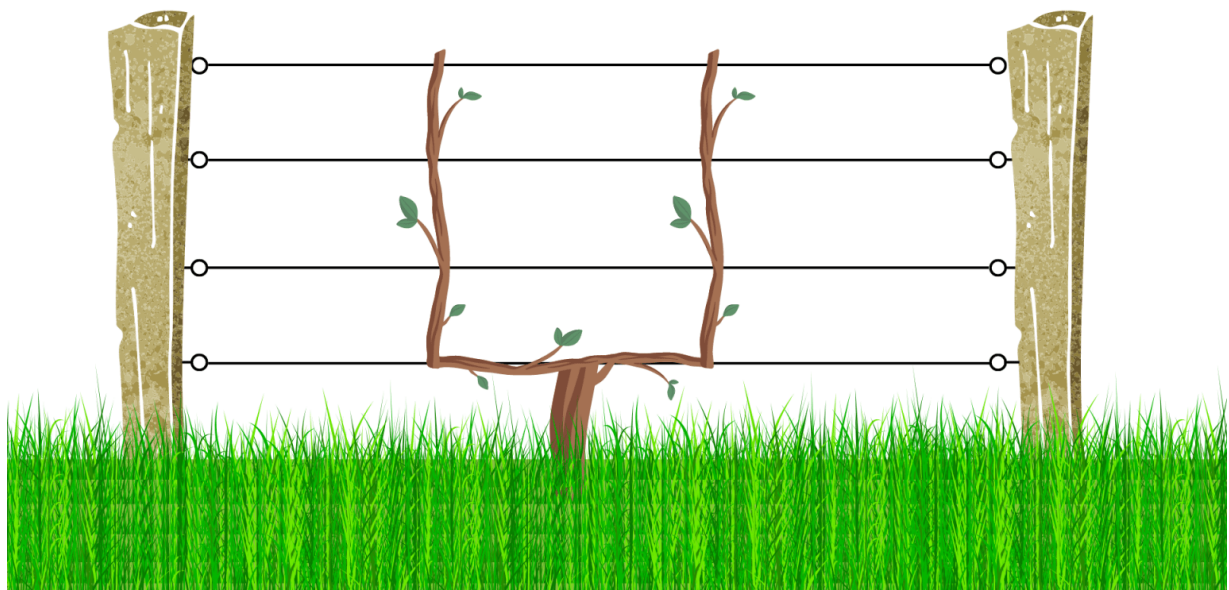
- Choose a strong support structure with evenly spaced tiers for your espaliered tree.
- Opt for young, pliable trees on semi-dwarf rootstock for easier training.
- Prune the branches and trunk to create the desired espalier shape.
- Secure branches and trunks to the trellis using galvanised wire or plant ties.
- As your tree grows, continue to prune and tie new branches to maintain the espalier shape.
- Remember that espaliering is a gradual process that requires dedication, but the beauty and functionality it adds to your garden space will make it all worthwhile.

Different Espalier Designs for Your Garden

When considering different espalier designs for your trees, it's essential to understand each shape's unique characteristics and time requirements. Here are some popular designs along with their distinct features:

U-Cordon

gardeningexpress
for everyone's garden

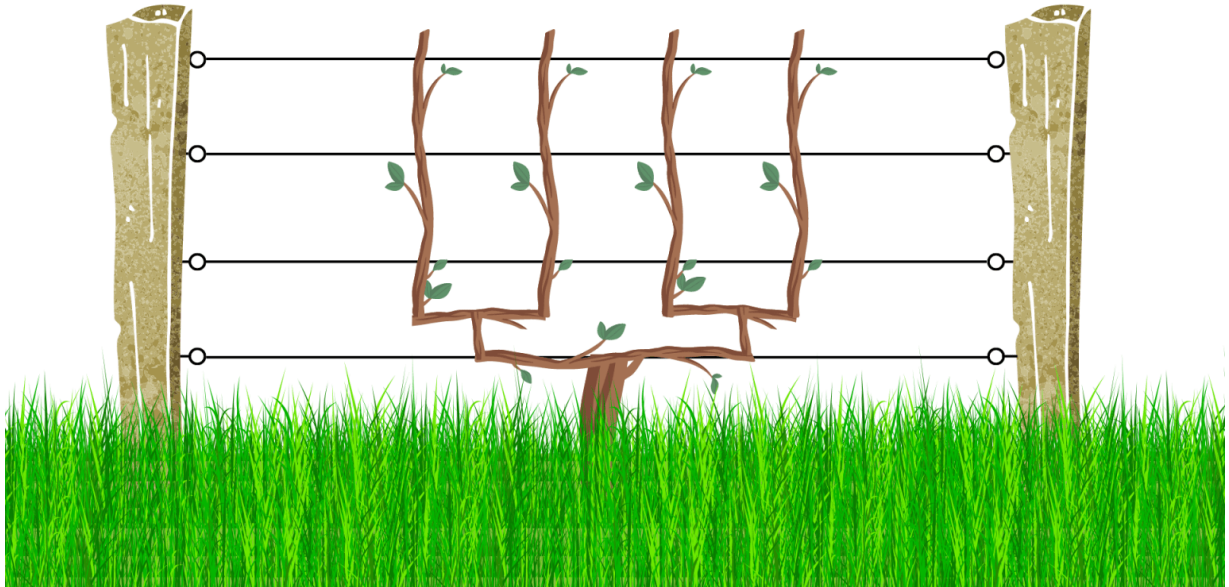


Formation Time: Two to three years.

This simple yet effective design creates a free-standing arch over a path. Planted on either side, this espalier is visually appealing and straightforward to manage. It offers a clean and neat appearance to your garden.

Double U-Cordon

gardeningexpress
for everyone's garden

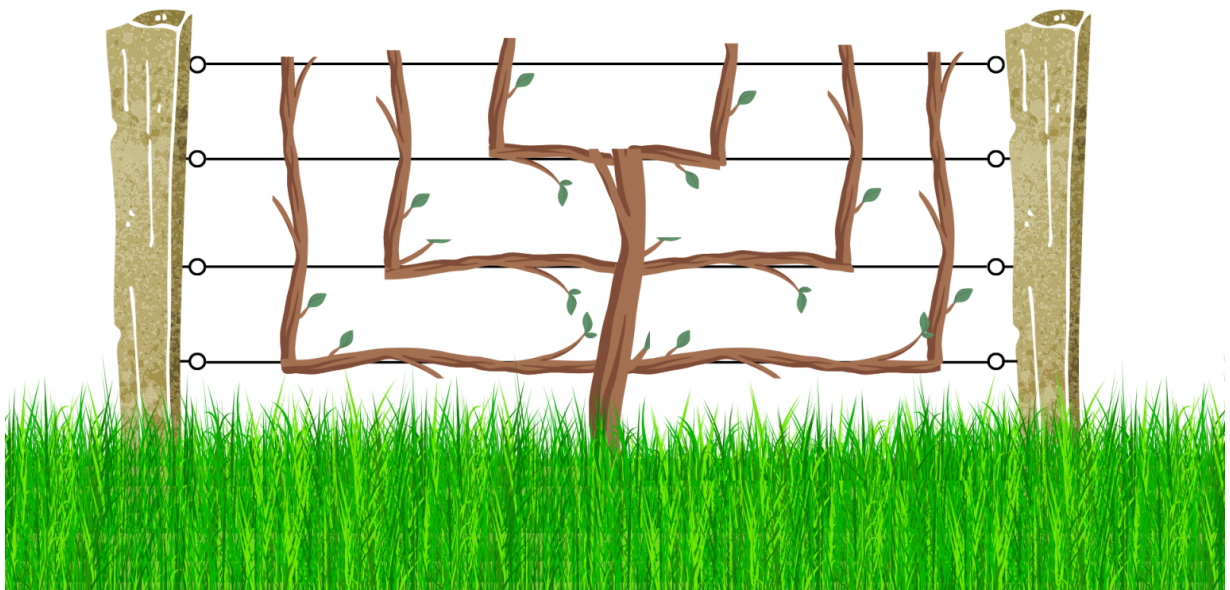


Formation Time: Minimum three years.

This design involves breaking the vertical plane twice, effectively slowing down the tree's growth. Doing so prevents one limb from taking over or the tree from becoming unruly. This shape provides stability and control over the tree's growth.

Palmette Verrier

gardeningexpress
for everyone's garden

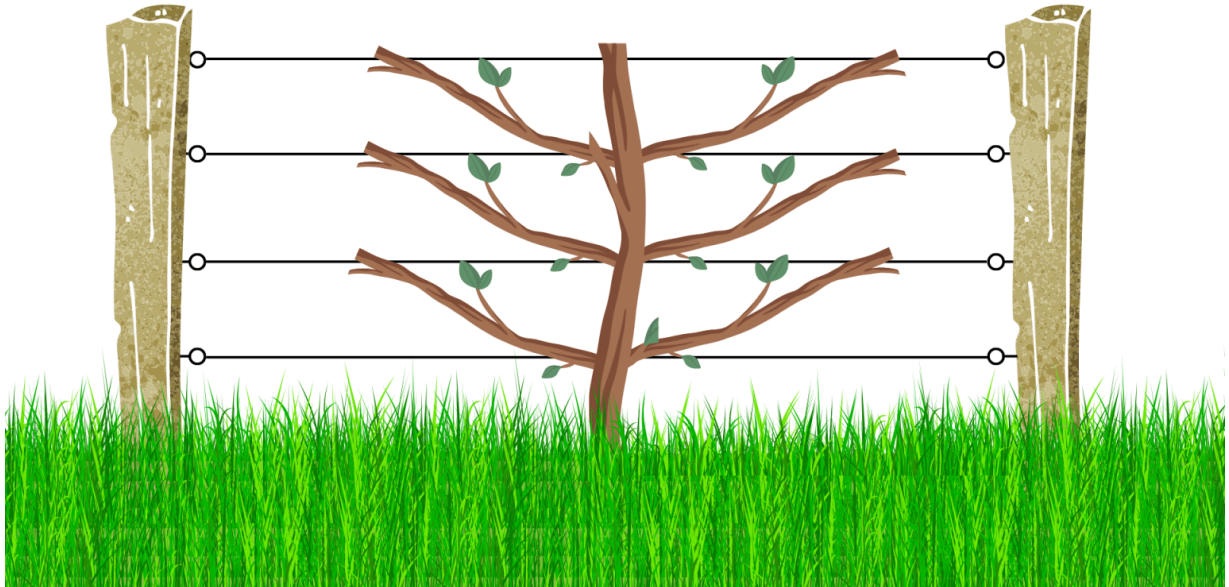


Formation Time: Minimum three years.

Breaking the central stem in this design results in an easily managed espalier shape. With its central stem divided, this design offers both beauty and manageability once established.

Palmette or Fan

gardeningexpress
for everyone's garden

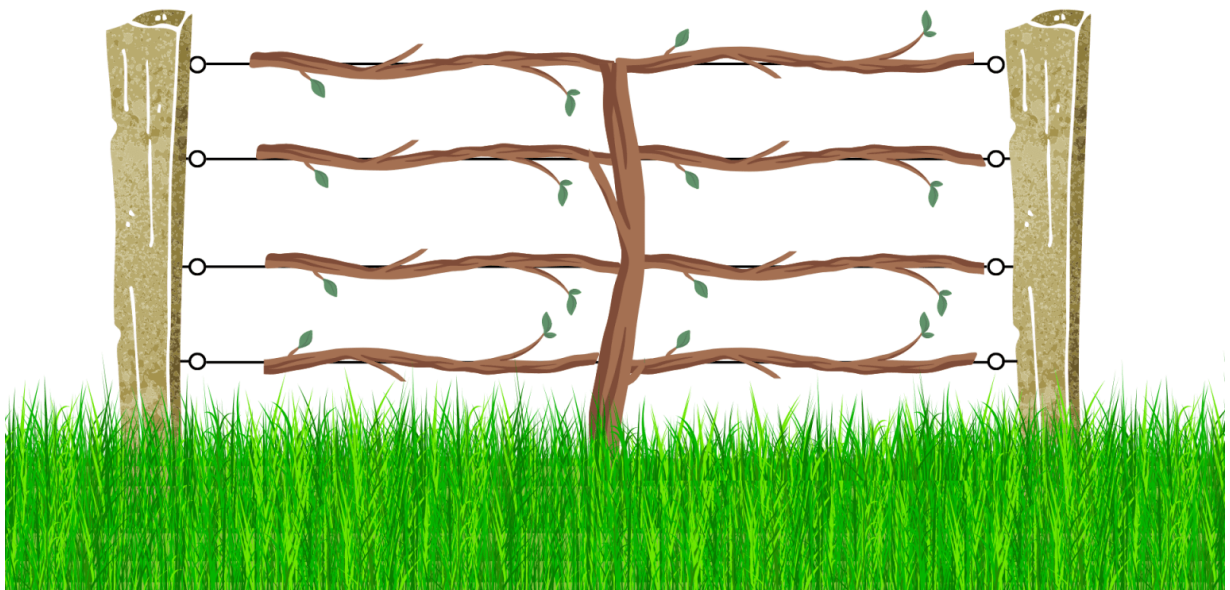


Formation Time: Dependent on the number of branches.

A palmette design entails a radiating pattern achieved by cutting back and lowering V-shaped espalier branches. With multiple buds forming branches, this design creates an eye-catching pattern that can be trained onto a trellis.

Drapeau Marchand

gardeningexpress
for everyone's garden

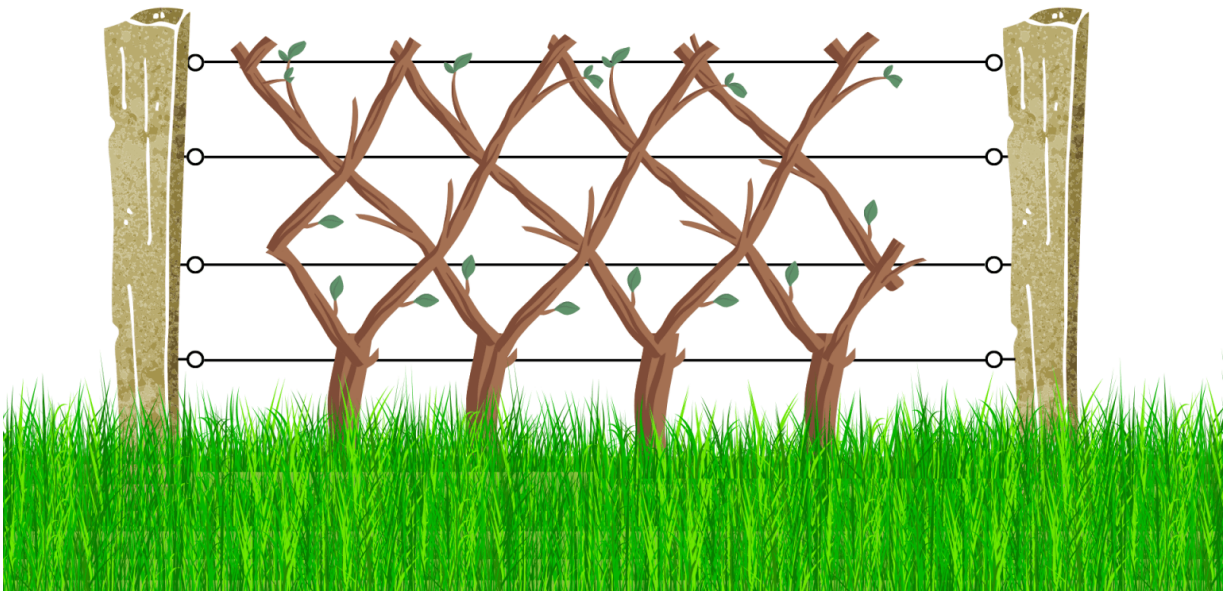


Formation Time: Variable.

This angled cordon design involves training branches to a right angle from the main stem, creating a distinctive visual effect.

Belgian Lattice

gardeningexpress
for everyone's garden



Formation Time: Minimum of two years.

Also known as the Belgian fence, this technique connects V-shaped trees to form a lattice effect or a free-standing living fence. The resulting structure serves both functional and decorative purposes in your garden. Choose the espalier design that aligns with your preferences and the time you're willing to invest, and enjoy the unique beauty and character it adds to your outdoor space.