



Ladder-less Fruit Harvesting Techniques:

Most homeowners site that the reason they can't harvest their fruit is because they don't have a ladder or don't want to get on a ladder. What surprises many is that much of the fruit that is harvested by Village Harvest volunteers is not harvested using ladders. Here are some of our ladder-less fruit harvesting techniques that you can use at home.

Extension Fruit Picker:

These fruit pickers come in many varieties. There are the standard basket type pickers that come on wooden or fiberglass poles. Fiberglass poles are lighter, don't splinter and can commonly be found extending to 12 feet. With a 12 foot extension fruit picker, it's possible to harvest up to a 18' tall tree. Any taller? Consider getting the tree pruned.



extension fruit picker

Specialty Fruit Pickers:

There are a number of specialty fruit pickers made for soft fruit or fruit with substantial stems that need to be clipped. These are usually sold just with the heads and need to be attached to a wood or fiberglass pole. Poles can be purchased separately but it's often more convenient to purchase an extension fruit picker and replace the head.



soft fruit picker



avocado picker

Extension Pruner:

Sometimes, especially if the fruit tree branches are very brittle or willowy, it can be best to just clip the fruit. The best pruners for the job will clip then hold the fruit so it doesn't fall to the ground. Extension pruners can extend to as much as 20 feet.

Shake and Catch:

A method developed by Village Harvest volunteers that's especially good for soft summer fruit. Gather 3-4 friends and family around the tree. Stretch a tarp or old sheet under the tree making sure that it doesn't touch the ground. Gently shake the branch above the tarp. The plums will fall to into the canopy typically without being bruised. When the canopy is full or heavy enough, scoop the plums into boxes and carry them away. Note that if the fruit hasn't been thinned, you will get a variety of ripeness that falls. The unripe fruit would be falling anyway due to having too much competition for space on the branch. Do this several times during the season and you'll have harvested nearly all the fruit. A variation on this that we've seen some homeowners use is to drape a net under the tree. As the



wind shakes the fruit down, it catches in the net. Daily, gather the fruit for breakfast. This method can be used for apples but you might consider a hard hat.

Pruning:

Probably your best defense against a ladder. And your only technique for cherries, figs, and kumquats that need to be harvested by hand. Keep trees to 15' tall, remove crossing and dead branches to make access to fruit easy on yourself. Citrus trees have high yields and are easy to harvest when pruned as bushes. Deciduous fruit trees can be pruned to have low canopies or to branch downward in a willow-like fashion. Additionally, there are special pruning/planting techniques that are designed for easy harvest. Consult a good garden book for espalier or cordon techniques.

Other Helpful Tools:

Protective Arm Sleeves: Either of canvas or nylon, these “sleeves” are designed to be impervious to thorns and branches. They are especially useful for oranges or lemons with thorns.

Harvesting Bags or Buckets: These tools are specifically designed for the type of fruit that’s being harvested. They free up your hands so you can use both hands to harvest and make the job easier and fun.

Ladder-less Fruit Harvesting Technique Suitability Guide:

* - preferred method

X- other options

Type of Fruit	Extension Fruit Picker	Specialty Fruit Picker	Extension Pruner	Shake & Catch	Prune
Apple	X	X	X	*	X
Apricot		X		*	X
Avocado	X	*	X		X
Cherry					*
Fig		X			*
Grapefruit	*		X		X
Lemon	*		X		X
Loquat			*		X
Orange	*		X		X
Peach/ Nectarine		X		X	*
Persimmon	*	X	X		X
Plum		X		*	X
Quince	X		X		X

Sources:

Common Ground: fruit pickers, fruit picking bags, protective sleeves, orchard ladders. Palo Alto, CA, www.commongroundinpaloalto.org.

Fruit Grower Supply: avocado picker heads & fiberglass poles, protective sleeves, fruit picking bags. Various throughout CA, www.fruitgrowers.com.

Lee Valley Tools: Soft Fruit Picker. Catalog & Web, www.leevalley.com.

Orchard Supply Hardware: extension fruit pickers, orchard ladders. Various throughout N. CA, www.osh.com.

Professional Horiticulture Associates: Avocado pickers, fruit picking bags. Campbell, CA, 408.374.6383

Village Harvest: instructions for making a fruit tree shaker, more fruit tree harvesting techniques, recipes, drop-off locations and more. www.villageharvest.org

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