Steep Leader Training System for Cherries

To be used in moderate density orchards with less than 20-foot in row spacing.

- Establish bottom whorl somewhere between knee and waist.
- It is better to start over and re-head a tree than try to live with a tree that is growing poorly or has poorly placed branches.
- Use toothpicks to establish wide branch angles.
- Select leaders early. Three or four "boss" limbs are plenty for orchards with less than 20-foot spacing.
- Leaders should be allowed to grow nearly vertical, in a steep leader pattern.
- Second whorl should be started three to four feet above first.
- All the wood except the main scaffold branches should be considered renewable.
- The biggest and firmest cherries grow at the base of one, two and three year old wood.
  - Older branches should therefore be renewed.
  - Don't prune off all the new wood, it needs to fruit
- Do not make bench cuts in moderate to high density orchards (less than 20 foot spacing). This causes a "V" shaped tree with no fruiting at the base.
- Trees should be triangular in shape for best light distribution, least shading and best fruiting throughout the tree.
- Biggest wood should be at bottom of tree. Keep in mind the concept of "big, smaller, smallest" as you go up the tree.
  - Where adjacent branches are of equal size, remove one.
  - Remove any branches that are 2/3 the diameter of the branch it is attached to, otherwise it will shade out the lower branches.
- Single out tips at the end of main leaders.
- Tie down branches to devigorate and encourage earlier production.
Tying down branches does not cost money, it pays.
Any branches except the main leaders are candidates to be tied down. You are attempting to make the bottom wide and the top narrow for better light distribution.
Tying down branches takes the place of bench cuts and allows for less pruning overall and earlier production.

Tip only in the bottom portion of trees.
This reinvigorates lower branches where vigor is hard to maintain and helps to insure larger cherries.
Tip only as high as you can reach with loppers. The top rarely needs to be invigorated, and tipping in the top just causes shading.
Proper water management and pruning are just as important as nitrogen management in promoting growth and vigor in a tree.