

Playtest Observations and Fixes:

1. Tool Selection:

Observation: It isn't always clear what tool you are currently using, needs a visual cue.

Design Analysis: While observing playtesters, this was the most apparent fix needed. Players were uncertain what tool they were in, which made it far too difficult to keep up. The uncertainty of your current tool was not intentional and made the game feel cheap. The clear modification needed was a way to inform the player what tool they are using at any given moment.

Modification: Made it so that when a tool is selected, that respective button is highlighted and slightly enlarged. This makes it visually clear what tool mode they are in which makes the game feel more about skill than randomness.

2. Water Mechanic:

Observation: The water mechanic isn't clear enough (not sure where/what to water).

Design Analysis: This issue stems from the lack of visual cues and UI explanations. There is no logic for the player to follow other than trial and error.

Modification: Added a particle effect that plays when the player is clicking on the appropriate collider that enables watering (the bottom part of the tree). Also made it so that the tree highlights in blue if the player is clicking in the wrong area while using the water tool. These visual cues make the mechanic much simpler to pick up on a first playthrough and even add more comical charm to the game.

3. Happiness Gauge:

Observations: The happiness gauge isn't clear enough since it determines when you lose. Losing, in turn, also feels unexpected.

Design Analysis: Because the happiness gauge wasn't explained at all, there were no real visual cues indicating that the player is about to lose. It made losing feel unearned. The modification needed was more about teaching the player rather than queuing them in.

Modification: Added text at the bottom of the gauge that reads "Tree Health" to make it evident what the gauge is indicating. Also made it so that the screen would glow increasingly red at the borders to inform the player they are losing. Finally, I made a tutorial slide show at the beginning of the game that explains all the UI elements and the basic info of the game to inform the players on how everything functions.

4. Fully Grown Apples:

Observation: Not clear when apples are fully grown so they can be harvested.

Design Analysis: Since there is no visual for fully grown apples other than they stop expanding in size, it makes it difficult for players to discern when an apple is fully grown or almost fully grown. Since apples can only be sheared when they are done growing, this distinction is very important. It can make players feel cheated if they lose because they were shearing an apple at 99% growth.

Modification: The apples will now display a sparkle when they have fully grown, making it clear when they can be harvested. While colour changing and a glow were options I tried, they still didn't clearly define the moment the apple can be harvested well enough.

5. Water Bar:

Observation: Not clear that no water = no spawning of apples.

Design Analysis: This is another issue where the player would only learn from trial and error. There was no clear indication that watering the tree was important, so the modification necessitates informing the player.

Modification: Added a tutorial slide explaining the water mechanic and the UI water bar to inform players of their correlation. Also made it so that the water tool button would start blinking blue when the water bar was at 0. This was in effort to encourage the player to change tools and water the tree.

6. Narrative:

Observation: The game has not enough narrative.

Design Analysis: Because there was no preamble about what the player is doing and why, the game lacked a narrative. It was basically a garden game where some long arms would try to steal yellow apples for no reason.

Modification: Before the tutorial slides, I added a couple of lines giving a quick basis on who you are playing as and why you are doing it. This at least gives players context and motivation. However, I do wish I could have expanded this narrative more using comic book panels and a proper ending.