

Proper pruning

Pruning is the most common tree maintenance procedure. Pruning cuts must be made with an understanding of how the tree will respond to the cut. Improper pruning can cause damage which continues for the life of the tree. Your goal should be pruning to yield a healthy, aesthetically pleasing tree.

■ **think twice** No branch should be removed without a reason. Common reasons for pruning are to remove dead branches, to remove crowded or rubbing limbs and to eliminate hazards.

■ **respect your elders** Mature trees should require little routine pruning. A widely accepted rule of thumb is never to remove more than one fourth of a tree's leaf bearing crown. In a mature tree, pruning even a single, large-diameter limb can create a wound that the tree may not be able to close.

The older and larger a tree becomes, the less energy it has in reserve to close wounds and defend against decay and insect attack. The pruning of large, mature trees is usually limited to the removal of dead or potentially hazardous limbs.

■ **think small** A properly made pruning wound is the smallest wound that can be made, allowing closure to start promptly all the way around it. The smallest wound closes the fastest. An important principle to remember is that a tree can recover from several small pruning wounds faster than from one large wound.

■ **it all depends** The amount of live tissue that should be removed depends on the tree size, species and age, as well as the pruning objectives. Younger trees will tolerate the removal of a higher percentage of living tissue than mature trees.

■ **bleeding heart** Dead and dying branches can be pruned anytime. Certain species, such as maples and birches, tend to "bleed" or drain sap from the pruning cuts. Although unattractive, this has little effect on the tree health.

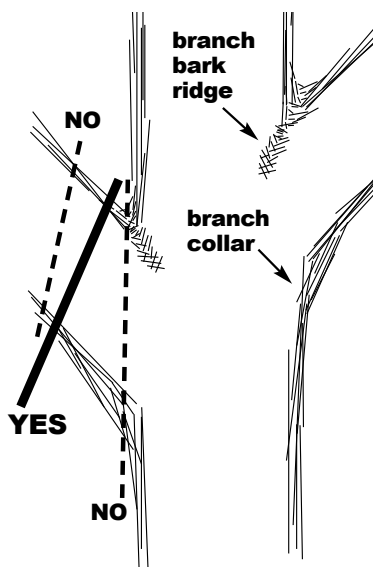
Pruning is the removal of branches, living or dead, from woody plants. The first rule of pruning is do no cutting without a reason.

Improper pruning can cause damage that will last the lifetime of the tree — or even shorten the lifespan of the tree.

■ **x marks the spot** Each cut should be made carefully, at the correct location, leaving a smooth surface with no jagged edges or torn bark. The correct anatomical location is just beyond the branch collar. The branch collar contains trunk or parent branch tissue and should not be damaged or removed. Properly pruned young trees will develop into structurally strong trees that should require little corrective pruning as they mature.

■ **ask the pro** Pruning trees can be dangerous. Use sharp tools. Make clean cuts. Be careful with all tools. If pruning involves working above the ground or using power equipment, it is best to hire a professional arborist.

■ **you're just too much** A common mistake is to remove too much inner foliage and small branches. It is important to maintain an even distribution of foliage along large limbs and in the lower portion of the crown. Over-thinning reduces the tree's sugar production capacity and can create tip-heavy limbs that are prone to failure.



■ **the best medicine** Wound dressings were once thought to accelerate healing, to protect against insects and diseases and reduce decay. Research has shown that dressings do not reduce decay or speed closure, and rarely prevent insect or disease infestations. Trees heal best when the clean wounds are left to heal themselves.

■ **perfectly timed** The best time to prune living branches is late in the dormant season or very early in spring before leaves form. Heavy pruning just after the spring growth flush should be avoided. This is when trees have just expended a great deal of energy to produce foliage and early shoot growth. Removal of a large percentage of foliage at this time can stress the tree.

■ **baby your trees** Pruning of newly planted trees should be limited to corrective pruning. Remove torn or broken branches.

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