

The majority of snow that fell on Ground hog day has now melted creating the opportune time to take a stroll through one's landscape and assess the health and vigor of deciduous trees and shrubs. While they remain fully dormant and their branches highly visible and void of leaves, now, late February through March, is the ideal time to correctively prune or repair any broken branches.

Large trees that have experienced serious breakage should be handled by a professional tree service. Repairing damage to mature trees involves heavy and dangerous work, something for which most amateurs are not prepared. Furthermore, most homeowners lack the proper equipment to handle large repairs.

If, however, one has smaller damaged trees or shrubs, an individual can usually repair the damage through corrective pruning techniques. Corrective pruning not only repairs broken branches, but it also helps to restore natural symmetry to a tree or shrub. Keep in mind, proper pruning of trees and shrubs while they are young results in less storm damage and minimizes corrective pruning of a mature tree. A few simple things to remember when pruning a tree are the following:

- Each cut has the potential to change the growth of the tree. Learn where and how to make the cut before picking up a pruning shears.
- Trees do not heal in the same way that people do. When a tree is wounded, it must grow over and compartmentalize the wound. As a result, the wound is contained within the tree forever.
- Small cuts do less damage to the tree than large cuts.
- Poor pruning causes damage that lasts for the life of the tree.



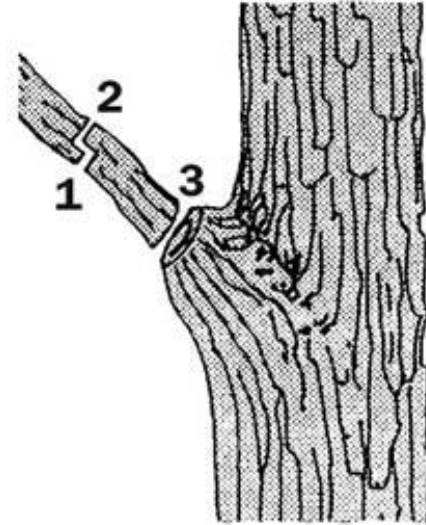
When pruning trees, it is important to have the right tool for the job. For smaller trees and branches, most of the cuts can be made with either a hand pruning shears, lopping shears or a pruning saw. The scissor-type or bypass blade pruners are preferred. They make cleaner, more accurate cuts. Smaller cuts can best be made with a pruning shears; whereas, cuts larger than one-half inch in diameter should be made with lopping shears or a pruning saw. Whatever tool you use, make sure it is sharp and clean.

Where one makes a pruning cut is critical to a tree's response in growth and wound closure. First and always, make pruning cuts just outside the branch collar. The branch collar is a slightly swollen area where the branch attaches to the trunk. Proper pruning means removing the branch so that the branch collar is not injured or removed.

To remove large branches, those over one inch in diameter, use the three-step cutting method. This procedure removes the weight of the limb before the final cut and eliminates the possibility of stripping the bark down the side of the main trunk.

The three-step cutting method involves:

- 1. Cut upward 1/3 the thickness of the branch***
- 2. Cut downward completely through the branch and remove.***
- 3. Trim off branch stub at branch collar***



Whether pruning a large or small branch, avoid making cuts between buds or branches leaving a stub. This method of pruning results in stem decay and erratic, misdirected sprout growth. If a permanent branch is to be shortened, cut it back to a lateral branch or bud.

Lastly, avoid using wound dressings. Wound dressings were once widely used; however, research has shown that dressings do not reduce decay or speed closure and rarely prevent insect or disease infestations. In some cases, wound dressings can harbor pathogens next to the wound thus exacerbating decay and disease.

Although some trees and shrubs have been damaged as a result of the recent snow storm, through proper pruning techniques, damage can be repaired.