

Late winter is the opportune time to prune deciduous trees and shrubs. Last week, I shared with you five reasons why winter is best. I also discussed briefly the main reasons trees and or shrubs generally need pruning —for the health of the tree and training the tree to become functional and aesthetically pleasing. Today I want to discuss safety — human safety and the dangers we can face while pruning trees.

According to OSHA (Occupation Safety and Health Administration), three common injuries are associated with tree trimming. They are electrocution, falling from trees or ladders and being struck by a tree or falling limbs.

Tree safety begins at planting. Before planting a tree, one should become familiar with the mature characteristics of that tree; especially one should be knowledgeable of its potential future height and width. Always subscribe to the simple rule, **look up before planting!** Avoid planting trees directly below power lines. If such a planting is necessary, select a tree that remains small at maturity— one that will not interfere with power lines. When tree branches are growing into power lines, or have the potential to fall onto power lines after being cut, do not consider pruning. Electrocution is no joking matter. Leave that job to the expert; one who is trained and licensed to work around such danger.

The average homeowner should be able to handle tree pruning if it does not involve large branches. For the do-it-yourselfer, I encourage pruning only those branches that can be safely reached while standing on the ground. All too often, when an inexperienced homeowner uses a ladder to reach large branches that need pruning or chooses to climb into the tree, falling accidents occur. Statistics show that ladder injuries are not caused by the height of the ladder; rather, injuries are most often caused when people use ladders improperly. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 50% of all ladder-related accidents are due to individuals carrying items as they climb. Think about this situation. Hanging onto a ladder rung for support and attempting to use a sharp cutting tool to remove a branch is dangerous. Such a scenario creates the perfect formula for a fall or injury. Leave the ladder and aerial work to a trained arborist.

I encourage routine pruning while trees are young and branches are small. Begin to shape and prune a tree one to two years after planting. By so doing, it

takes care of the health of the tree and at the same time establishing good tree structure. It also eliminates hazardous pruning situations for the homeowner later on. All too often, a homeowner underestimates the weight of a large tree branch before attempting to remove it from the tree. A branch is considered large if at its point of attachment it is three inches or more in diameter. For the inexperienced homeowner, removing a branch of this size or larger always poses a danger that could easily result in injury or death. Again, it is prudent to leave the large pruning jobs to the experts.

Even when pruning small branches, one should practice good safety habits. Understand the operation and maintenance of sharp cutting tools. Dress appropriately when pruning. Wear protective clothing, and especially wear durable gloves and eye protection while pruning.

Next week, more about basic pruning procedures.