

Get up and get going. It is time to prune. Pruning is nothing more than selective cutting. If one's trees have been pruned on a regular basis, most future pruning cuts will be small, and the equipment needed is simple. All one needs is a sharp by-pass pruning shears and a quality hand tree saw. Use the shears for removing branches one-half inch in diameter or less and the saw for larger branches. For high-reach branches, I prefer using a using a combination tool with a shears and saw attached to a long handle making it easier to reach the branch while standing on the ground.



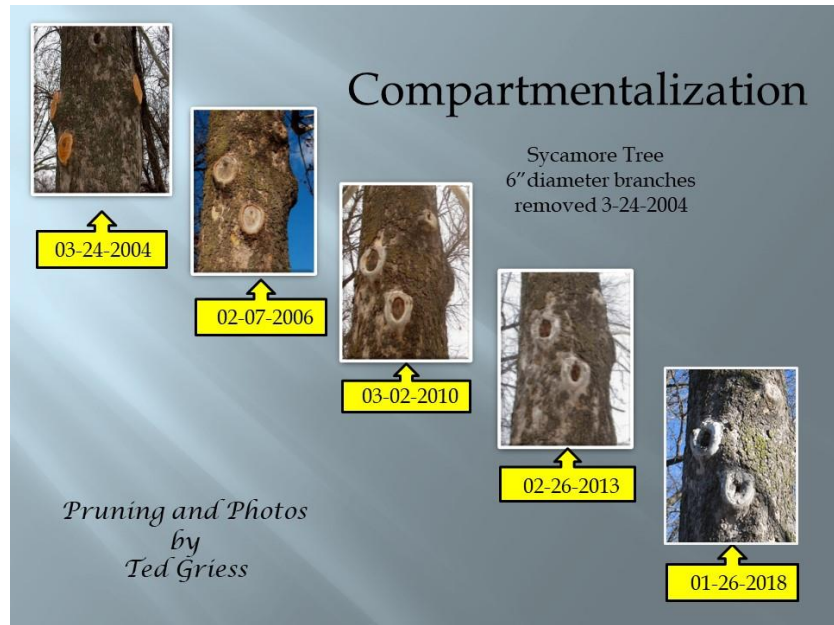
The first step in pruning is to examine closely the tree's structure. Look for undesirable branches that need removing. Undesirables include branches that are damaged or rubbing against one another. Both of these are potential sites for disease and insect pest problems. Double leader branches are also undesirables. Double leaders are two vertical branches growing exceptionally close at the top of the tree forming a tight, narrow angle. Double leaders are inevitably candidates for future wind damage due to their weak attachment. Removing the least desirable leader is the goal. The fact is the greater the angle of the branch to the trunk of the tree, the stronger the branch attachment.

Many city ordinances dictate how high branches must be pruned above the surface of a sidewalk or above a street right-of-way. If branches are interfering with pedestrian or vehicle traffic, they, too, are undesirables. Yearly routine pruning helps to minimize this problem while keeping the wounds small and making healing quicker.

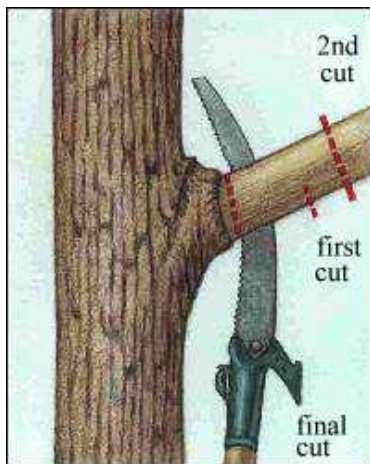


After locating undesirable branches, knowing where to make the cut is important. Avoid making flush cuts to the trunk of a tree. Flush cuts create wounds that rarely close properly and usually invite disease problems. Also, avoid cutting and leaving stubs. They, too, invite disease problems. Look for a slightly swollen region at the end of the branch where it attaches to the trunk. This swollen area is called the branch collar. It plays an important role in decay resistance. A pruning wound heals best if the branch is severed from the trunk just along the outer edge of the branch collar. If the cut is made at this point, the tree closes over the wound with callous tissue, a process called compartmentalization, forming a doughnut hole,

healing pattern. With each subsequent year, the hole in the doughnut grows smaller until the wound is completely closed. Attached is a photo of a sycamore tree that I initially pruned on 3-24-2004. Notice the slow time-lapse compartmentalization healing process. This is one reason why it is important to prune undesirable branches when they are young and small, creating smaller wounds and expediting the healing time.



A tree saw should be used when cutting branches larger than one inch in diameter. For large branches, follow the three-cut rule. Make the first cut about a foot or so out from the trunk of the tree. This cut is an undercut to a depth of no greater than one-third the diameter of the branch. Make the second cut out beyond the first cut and make it from the top down, cutting all the way



through the branch. While making the second cut, the weight of the branch causes the branch to breakaway at the undercut, thus avoiding damage to the trunk of the tree. Make the third cut at the branch collar to remove the stub. In all cases, do not attempt to remove more than one-third of the tree's canopy at one time.

Lastly, although one might consider using a tree wound dressing after pruning, avoid doing so. Research has shown the wound closes better if exposed to the elements.

Grab a pair of pruning shears and head outdoors. It is time to prune!