

## TIME TO ID TREE FAULTS AND PRUNING NEEDS

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During winter, when trees are leafless, is a good time to check for potential faults and pruning needs. Observe shade trees now for faults and pruning needs but wait until late winter or early spring to prune.

We need tall shade trees to have climate resilient landscapes and communities, not to mention nicer places to live and energy conservation. We also need structurally sound trees to be weather ready.

Winter is a good time to assess shade trees for potential hazards. During winter, branch structure and areas of damage are easier to see when leaves are not hiding them.

To help homeowners know what to look for, Nebraska Extension has a free publication titled "Tree Hazard Awareness". It can be found on our [extensionpubs.unl.edu](https://extensionpubs.unl.edu) website.

Potential faults to look for in a tree include co-dominant leaders, cracks, decay, fungal conks, girdling roots and trunk lean. Our tree hazard awareness publication has pictures to help in identifying issues.

If any of the defects pictured in the NebGuide match defects in your trees, contact a professional arborist to further evaluate the tree.

If you prefer to work with a certified arborist with specialized training and experience in evaluating tree defects and hazards, one place to find them is <https://go.unl.edu/nebraskacertifiedarborists>.

Correct pruning during the first 3 to 15 years of a trees life is one of the best ways to keep trees sound and avoid the hazards depicted in our NebGuide.

Trees are a long term investment that provide numerous benefits. It would be worth hiring an experienced arborist to check your tree every five years for pruning needs. Tree owners often wait until it is difficult to correct structural issues that then turn into potential hazards.

Tree faults that timely and correct pruning can prevent are co-dominant leaders, crisscrossing or rubbing branches and branches with weak attachments. And the smaller a branch is when it is pruned relays into less risk of wound decay.

While it is best to hold off on pruning trees until late winter, now is a good time to remind people not to use tree wound dressings, pruning paint, or any product sold that says it will promote healing of tree wounds.

When a tree branch is pruned, human instinct is to put a band aid on the wound but this is one of the worst things we can do. Tree wounds do not ever heal and so no product will promote healing.

When a tree is wounded, such as with pruning, it sends defense chemicals to the wound to seal it off. Then, during the growing season, the tree develops wound wood to close the wound. In place of healing, trees seal wounds. This is one reason lumber had darker colored knots.

Research has repeatedly shown any type of tree wound dressing interferes with a trees natural defense mechanisms and with this sealing process.

Wound dressings also trap moisture to promote decay and prevent wound wood from forming. It is best to leave these products on the store shelf and off of your trees.