

When to Prune Established Trees:

When is the best time of year to prune shade trees?

The best time of year to prune **deciduous shade trees** (those that drop their leaves) is late winter (February and March). The advantages to pruning at this time of year are:

- the absence of foliage makes it easier to see branch structure
- rapid callus development occurs soon after pruning and wounds close quicker
- insects and disease levels may be lower at this time of year

Pruning in fall (August through early November) and during the spring growth period is discouraged.

The disadvantages of fall pruning are:

- new growth may be stimulated and may not harden off before winter
- plant dormancy can be delayed and increase the chance of freeze injury to stems
- stored “food” in branches is removed before trees transport it into the roots
- fall pruning wounds will not begin to callus over until new growth begins in spring and wounds are open invitations to disease and insect pests
- levels of disease, especially decay organisms, and insects may be higher at this time of year

The disadvantages of spring pruning are:

- bark/wood is tender and more easily torn
- during or just after the spring growth period, a tree’s food reserves are at its lowest; pruning during this time can weaken the tree

Dead, broken or diseased branches should be pruned as soon as possible once they are noticed.

Maples, birch and walnut are often pruned in mid-summer to avoid “bleeding” (loss of sap) that can occur if these trees are pruned in late winter. Sap flow, or bleeding, from a cut branch is part of a tree’s defense and is not harmful to the tree.

When is the best time of year to prune evergreen conifers?

Pines: Pines do not have to be pruned. If you choose to do so, prune from June into July when the new needles (candles) are half grown. If pruned too early, too many buds will develop and subsequent years growth will be deformed. If pruned too late, the pine tree or shrub will be stunted. Pruning cuts should be made on current years growth (candles). Pruning into 2-year old wood, (last year’s growth), delays bud formation for one year.

Spruce, Fir, Juniper, Arborvitae, Japanese Yew: Late winter into early spring (Note: Spruce and Fir rarely need pruning)

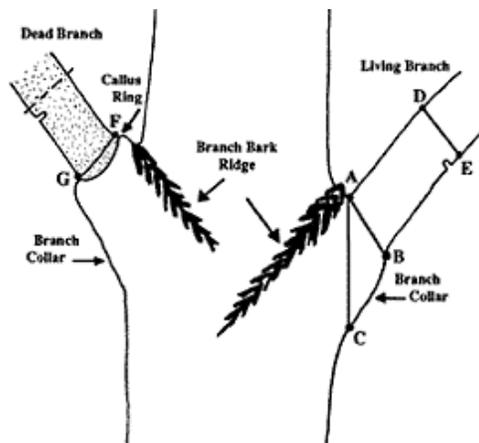
How to Prune:

What should be pruned on a shade tree?

In general, look for and remove lower branches interfering with foot traffic or a built structure; branches that crisscross and rub against another branch; or branches growing closely parallel with another branch. In some cases, branches with very narrow forks, or angles where they grow off the trunk or another branch, may need to be removed as well.

Where do you make pruning cuts when removing a tree branch?

Prune branches just outside the branch bark ridge and branch collar. Do not make pruning cuts flush with the trunk and do not leave branch stubs. In the figure below, cuts A to B and G to F are correct pruning cuts. The photo below shows a complete callus ring which is a sign of a good pruning cut. (Figure and photos taken from Nebguide G91-1035-A (Revised July 2002) Tree Injuries – Prevention and Care)



Is it okay to top a tree?

No, trees should not be topped. Topping is the drastic cutting back of the tree's crown so all that is left are large branch stubs. Suckers, that can become quite large, grow from these stubs. The stubs eventually begin to decay. If the tree does not die soon, you end up with weakly attached, large suckers growing on decaying branches. This is a hazard to people, houses, pets and vehicles.

Treating Pruning Wounds

Should pruning wounds be treated with a wound dressing or paint?

No. Research has shown these products can interfere with the trees own response to the wound and actually increase the chance of decay developing in the wound. A correct and clean pruning cut is the best way to prevent decay in pruning wounds. Wound dressings do not prevent insects either.