

How do I prune trees?

Proper pruning enhances the beauty and natural form of trees and benefits their healthy growth. Consider the limitations of the planting site and select trees with the right size and shape.

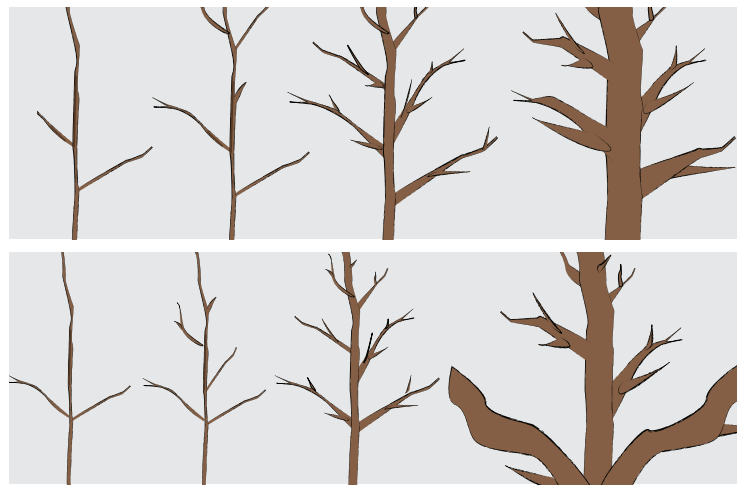
Pruning Young Shade and Ornamental Trees

Your trees have been pruned as they were growing in the nursery. Limit your pruning as much as possible on a newly transplanted tree because the foliage helps to photosynthesize food that is necessary for the tree's establishment.

After your tree is established, the pruning you do should take into consideration the natural growth habit of your tree. Start pruning when the tree is developing its crown and you will be rewarded with a healthy, attractive tree.

Branches that should be removed from trees:

- Eliminate double leaders
- Remove dead or dying branches
- Remove crossing branches that are rubbing and damaging bark. Open wounds can attract insects and disease.
- Remove branches that form a narrow crotch
- Remove water sprouts (strongly upward growing branches common on flowering Crabapples), and suckers (vigorous shoots that originate at the base of the trunk, from the roots).



Timing

Prune Oak, Honeylocust, and Elm while completely dormant to reduce risk of disease. Other trees can be pruned throughout the year except during leaf out or at time of leaf drop. A few types of trees, notably Maples and Birch, are termed bleeders. If pruned in spring, bleeders produce a great deal of sap. This loss of sap is not harmful to the tree. Dormancy is the preferred time to prune most trees.

Do NOT Top Trees

The worst possible thing you can do to your tree is to top it. While this may cause a lot of lush sucker growth to form, topping introduces massive decay, root death, weak and hazardous branches, and greatly shortens the life of the trees.

Cost

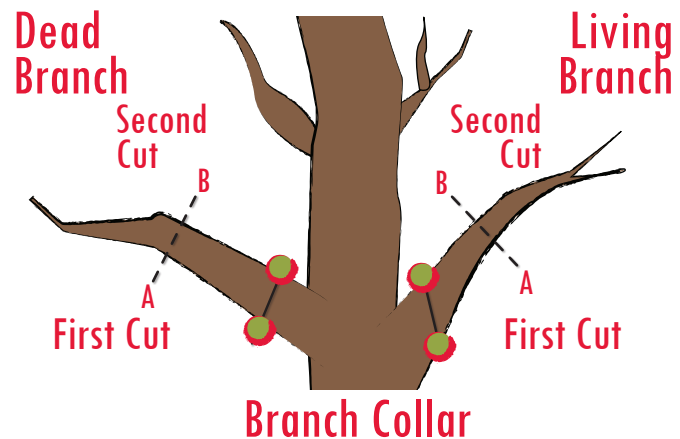
To a worker with a saw, topping a tree is much easier than applying the skill and judgement of good pruning. Therefore, topping may cost less in the short run. However, the true costs of topping are hidden. These include: reduced property value, the expense of removal and replacement if the tree dies, the loss of other trees and shrubs if they succumb to changed light conditions, the risk of liability from weakened branches, and increased future maintenance. Consult a certified arborist to determine an acceptable method of reducing crown sizes of large trees.

No Flush Cuts

Sometimes larger branches must be removed from mature trees. Branches up to 4-5 inches can be removed but call in a certified arborist if the limb in question is especially heavy, too high, or hanging over electrical wires, a building, or fence that could be damaged when it falls.

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When sawing branches off of trees, “undercut” the branch first at least 4 inches from the trunk to prevent tearing the bark and leaving a large wound on the tree. Then make a top cut all the way through the branch a few inches outside the first cut. The weight of the limb is then removed with the second cut. The final cut should be made from point A to point B to preserve the branch bark ridge and the branch collar, which speeds healing of the wound. The branch ridge and collar area is made of cells that store natural chemicals that prevent decay. Cutting the limb flush with the trunk, once a common practice, removes the collar and prevents proper healing.



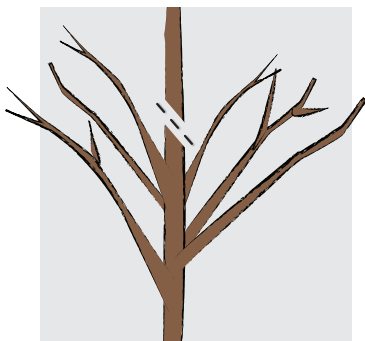
On the other hand, take care not to leave a stub beyond the collar because it won't heal properly either. The short protrusion that does remain after proper cut will over and become less noticeable as the tree grows. Wound dressings are no longer recommended except when pruning oaks in an emergency during March 30th through November 1st. The pruning paint deters picnic beetles which are capable of spreading oak wilt to wounded oaks during leaf out.

Prune safely. If you are not confident of doing the work safely, contact a professional.

Pruning Evergreens

In June, head back individual branches of junipers, Yews, Arborvitae and Hemlock to create an informal effect and allow them to retain their natural habit of growth. All four evergreens can be sheared into a formal hedge if preferred.

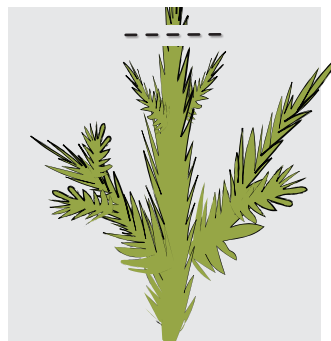
The new shoots of line, Fir, Spruce, and Pine can be pruned back halfway to reduce annual growth, which results in a bushier appearance.



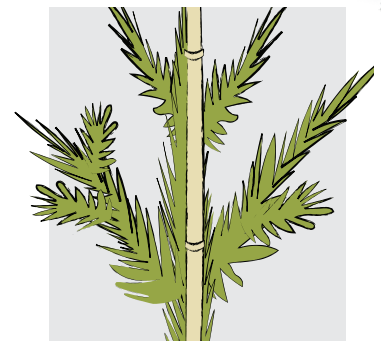
Prune pines in late spring by removing one half of the candle or shoot. Do not damage needle tips, as the tips of cut needles tend to turn brown.



You can reduce open spaces on spruces by cutting off one half of the leader, or terminal shoot, in the spring when the new needles are about half developed.



If a tree develops two leaders, remove the less desirable one in early spring. Trees with more than one leader are weaker and less attractive than trees that have a single, strong, central leader.



You can replace a lost leader by tying one of the branches in the top whorl to a vertical brace.