

Proper Pruning Practices

An introductory guide to why, where, how and when to prune your trees and shrubs

- I. Why is Pruning important for your trees and shrubs?
 - a. Health/Safety
 1. Removal of diseased or insect infested wood
 2. Removal of undesirable growth (crossing-rubbing and 'water sprout' growth)
 3. Removal of branches for line-of-sight
 4. Removal of 'dangerous' (usually dead wood) that may fall and cause injury
 - b. Appearance
 1. Pruning to enhance the natural form of the tree
 - a. De-current (spherical) or Ex-current (pyramidal), it's important to pick the right tree for the location so you're not fighting against the natural growth form of the plant.
 - b. Removal of excessive crown growth in a plant. Many pear trees, pin oaks, and zelkova are heavily branched and will need corrective pruning when young
 2. Removal of naturally thinning branches due to shading
 3. Pruning a plant to promote flowering and knowing when to prune so you do not inhibit flowers.
- II. There are right and wrong ways to prune your plant material
 - a. Two examples of the wrong type of pruning in trees are pollarding & topping
 1. Both are bad because they encourage a flush of growth at the tips of mature branches that form weak points in the tree...epicormic and adventitious growth.
 - b. Topping of shrubs (shearing) can be done if hedging is desired. Be careful, though as branches may become 'heavy' at the ends.
 - c. The best pruning practices are done to encourage the longest life possible in plants.
 - d. Plants cannot think, therefore we need to think a little bit for them!
- III. Tools of the Trade. What do I need to prune my trees/shrubs?
 - a. Hand Pruners/Loppers
 1. Bypass Pruner/Lopper
 2. Anvil Cut Pruner/Lopper
 - b. Hand Saw
 - c. Pole Pruner
 - d. Sanitizing Solution (70% alcohol or 10% bleach solution)

IV. Proper Way to Remove a Branch

a. Three-cut pruning method (See Illustration Attached)

1. First, create a 'break point' by cutting approximately 6" out from where the branch joins the main stem. Begin by cutting at the bottom of the branch and continue $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ through the stem
2. Second, move out on the branch approximately 1-3" from the first cut. Begin at the top of the branch and cut through until main portion of branch falls off
3. Hold the remainder of the stem in one hand to prevent tearing and finish the cut off starting at the bark ridge on top and following the natural line **outside** the branch collar.

V. Deciding the Proper Time to Prune Your Trees and Shrubs

a. Trees and shrubs without showy flowers

1. Prune when they are dormant
2. It's easier to see the form of the tree- to correct any bad issues
3. It will let the tree recover the quickest from the cut.
4. Less fluids flowing up and down the tree that could attract insects and promote disease.

b. Spring Flowering trees and shrubs

1. Always best to prune when dormant
2. 2nd option is to prune immediately after flowering
3. The flower buds will be formed on the new growth for next season.

c. Summer flowering trees and shrubs

1. Always prune when dormant
2. Buds will form on new branches during the next growing season and flower normally

For a detailed guide to pruning practices, make sure to visit the USDA Forest Service:
www.na.fs.fed.us/Spfo/pubs/howtos/ht_prune/prun001.htm

