



Tree Pruning Guidelines

Pruning is defined as “the removal of part of the plant for the benefit of all of the plant”. Pruning is useful for controlling tree size as well as improving the tree’s health and appearance. It is best to prune deciduous trees in late winter, while dormant.

Before pruning, take a moment to decide what that particular tree should look like when pruned. First, prune away any dead, diseased, or criss-crossing branches. Then, go for form. Make the smallest cuts first and the largest ones last. Cuts larger than 1 inch may be covered with tree wound paint or spray to prevent disease.

SMALL STEMS AND SHOOTS

With pruning shears, cut away the unwanted growth, cutting just above a healthy lateral bud. Cut at an angle, about 1/4 inch above the bud from which you want a branch to grow—more may cause the entire stem to die back. Less may damage the bud. Cut upward, for a closer, easier cut with the angle in the direction you want the new branch to grow. Clip off any suckers and water sprouts as they drain vigor from the desired branches. (Suckers are strong sprouts that grow from below the graft union or the ground; water sprouts are similar, but they grow higher on the trunk or in the tree.)

SMALL BRANCHES

Branches up to 1 1/4 inches should be pruned with lopping shears. Cut upward for ease and reduce the danger of the bark tearing as the limb falls. Small limbs should be cut as close to the trunk or branch as possible.

LARGER BRANCHES

A sharp chain or pruning saw will work on any branch up to about 3 inches in diameter. If a branch is too heavy to support with your free hand, first make a rough cut about 6 inches from the trunk, then cut the stuff off next to the tree trunk. This precaution keeps the bark from being single-edged saw and the ‘three-cut’ method:

1. Trim off the side branches, then make a shallow cut at the underside of the limb about 1 or 2 feet from the trunk.
2. Make a second cut at the upper side of the branch, about 2 inches from the first cut. The limb will then fall away without tearing the bark.
3. Make a third cut where the limb meets the trunk, at the “shoulder rings” (or, if you can’t find these rings, cut from the top angle of attachment to the bottom angle of attachment).

CUTTING A LONG BRANCH TO SHAPE

A tree usually produces branches to conform with its natural shape, but sometimes a branch will go awry. You can restore the natural shape of the tree by pruning during its dormant period. Cut branch to about 1/3 of its length to a side shoot growing in the same direction.