

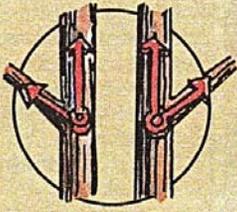
How to Prune Your Trees

“As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined.” This insightful saying about education also serves as the cardinal principle for pruning trees. How you prune your tree during its first few years will affect its shape, strength, and life span. Proper pruning will save you money and give you safer, healthier, more beautiful, and easier-to-maintain trees.

Keys to Good Pruning

1. Prune early in the tree's life so pruning wounds are small, but do not start until the third year or so. A new transplant needs its leaves to produce for new growth.

2. Identify the best leader and lateral branches before you begin pruning and remove any defective parts before pruning to form. Try to find and use lateral branches that form “10 o'clock” or “2 o'clock” angles with the trunk. Branches with such angles will have greater strength than those with sharper angles.



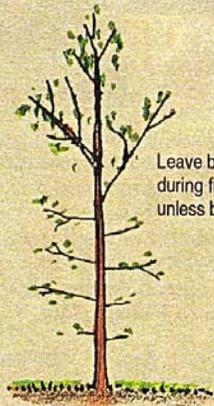
3. Keep your pruning tools sharp. One-hand pruning shears with curved blades work best on young trees.



Prune with an eye to the future

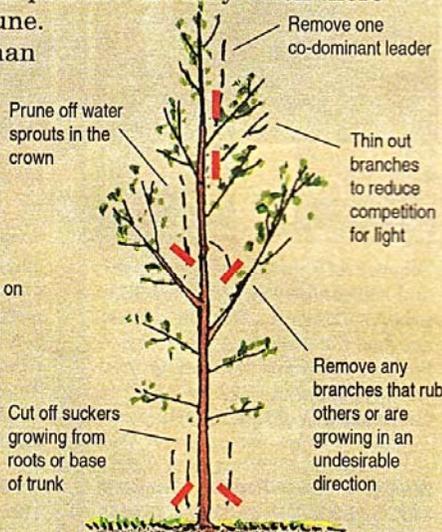
As you prune, remember that the branches do not move up the trunk as the tree grows. A branch 5 feet from the ground now will be 5 feet off the ground in 10 years—only thicker and longer than it is now. Try to visualize what a particular branch will look like later, and remove any branches that will cause an obvious problem. Prune shade trees as lightly as possible and only when there is a good reason to prune.

Never remove more than one-fourth of a tree's crown in a season.



Leave branches on during first year, unless broken

Tree as planted



Prune off water sprouts in the crown

Remove one co-dominant leader

Thin out branches to reduce competition for light

Cut off suckers growing from roots or base of trunk

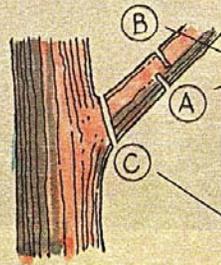
Remove any branches that rub others or are growing in an undesirable direction

By age 3-4 years

How to make a pruning cut

Pruning Large Limbs:

Large, heavy limbs could tear loose during pruning, stripping bark and creating jagged edges that invite insects and disease. That won't happen if you follow these steps.



Cut part way through the branch from beneath.

Make a second cut on the top of the branch, several inches out from the first cut. This will allow the limb to fall and be safely removed.

Make a final cut next to the trunk, just outside the branch collar, with the lower edge farther away from the trunk than at the top.

Pruning Smaller Branches:

Smaller branches should be cut just beyond a lateral bud or another small lateral branch. The ideal cut is sharp and clean, and made on a slight angle.



Correct Pruning Cut



Too Close

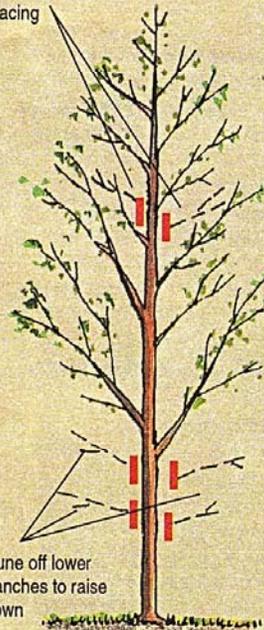


Too Long



Too Slanted

Thin out branches for more even spacing

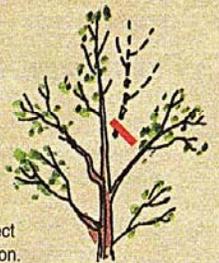


Prune off lower branches to raise crown

By age 5-7 years

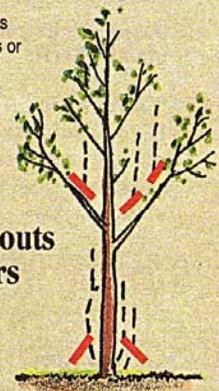
Learn more at arborday.org/pruning

Double Leaders



Select a single leader and protect it from competition. Remove co-dominant leaders that have crooks or other defects.

Watersprouts & Suckers



Suckers and watersprouts are rapidly growing, weakly attached branches that can occur at the base or in the crown. Remove them as soon as possible.