

How to Train a Tree

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The single largest myth nonarborists have about trees is - "oh those trees are small we can take care of them ourselves". Surely removing a few low limbs that bump your head while you mow is not complicated. However gaining the knowledge to structurally prune young trees and having the skills to implement the pruning plan takes time and practice.

The majority of tree limbs that fail in storms fail due to the lack of training pruning. Structural (training) pruning removes weakly attached small diameter limbs on young trees and creates a strong framework for the future tree. Structural pruning is not one single event; it must be done every few years. When a larger limb is removed decay will move in to fill the space. One rule of thumb we use on young trees is using hand saws, hand pruners, pole pruners and pole saws. Using a chain saw usually means a larger limb is being removed, which can leave a tree structurally unsound in the future.



Removal of a secondary leader.

The earlier you start the more you have to gain. All too often new trees are put in the ground, mulched and watered (if they are lucky), but then forgotten until it's in the way or aesthetically needs attention. Then what? Time to do some training, if it's not too late.

First establish a dominant leader (single stem) by subordinating any codominant stems. If that's all there is to it then what's the big deal? You don't need a tree care professional right? Few people see there is an art and science behind proper pruning. Anticipating future form and knowing what your objectives are not always easy. Knowing a tree's natural form or habit can be critical in being successful with any of these objectives.

There are seven main objectives for pruning described by Ed Gilman, University of Florida paraphrased below.

1) **Reduce risk of failure:** Reduce risk by establishing a structural pruning that begins at planting.

2) **Provide clearance:** Growth can be directed away from an object such as a building, power lines or fairways.

3) **Reduce shade and wind resistance:** Turf, ground covers or shrubs can receive



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more sunlight when live foliage is removed intentionally over a period of time.

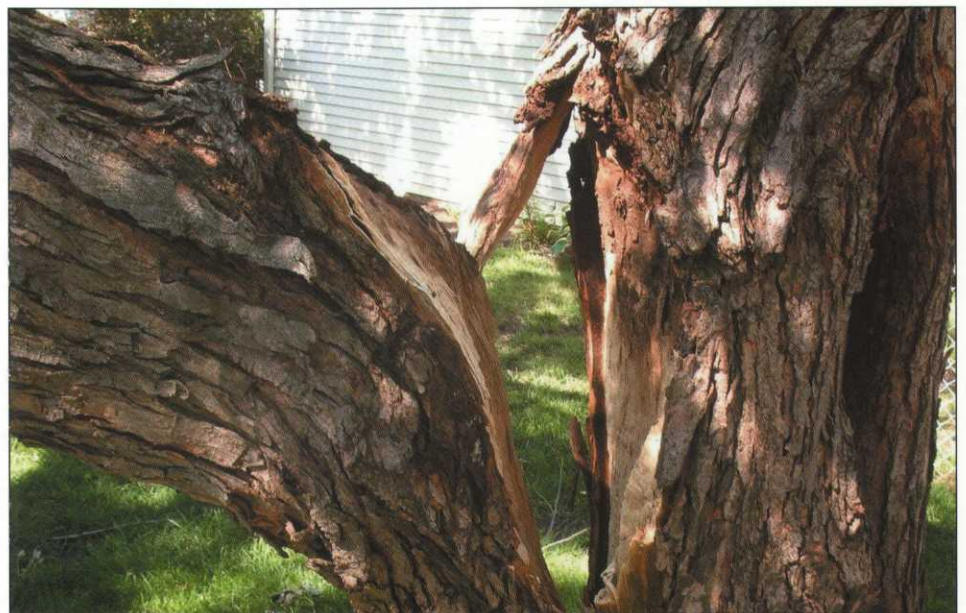
4) **Maintain health:** Remove dead, diseased and rubbing branches to maintain health.

5) **Influence flower or fruit production:** Pruning can influence the amount and size of flowers by heading back several branches. Fruit production can be eliminated or reduced by removing flowers.

6) **Improve a view:** By raising the canopy or continued crown cleaning a view can be enhanced or opened.

7) **Improved aesthetics:** Make trees look more appealing by crown cleaning or raising depending on the objective.

Take the opportunity now to do just a small amount of pruning - it will save more time and money later. Or ask for help from a professional. It's one of the best investments you'll ever make.



An example of a weak crotch that could have been avoided with training.