

Pruning and Common Sense

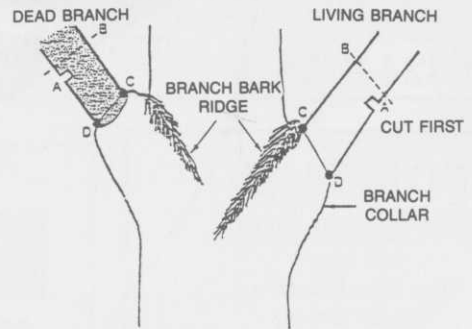
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It has often been said that pruning and common sense go hand in hand. Too often though, we view the pruned trees in our communities and wonder indeed where the common sense went. Perhaps it went on the brush pile, callously disregarded like the tree parts that were rejected. What can be done about some of this appalling butchery and total disregard for the natural beauty of our trees? Plenty, if we just think about it. By following some basic rules and pruning techniques, we can have a profound effect on the shaping and maintenance of our community trees.

To many tree care novices, pruning means removing branches, often with little thought as to what will happen afterwards. Pruning rules and techniques are thought of as unimportant or not even thought about at all. It is easy to understand their position when we hear "professional" terms such as Drop Crotching, Callous, Branch Collar, Included Bark, Scaffold Systems and other seemingly unrecognizable words being used to describe the proper way to prune trees.

So what are we trying to accomplish with tree pruning anyway? First, we should look at why we prune. One reason is to help the plant develop its form. Damaged and broken branches, crossing or rubbing branches, inward growing branches and multiple leaders should all be pruned. Another reason for pruning is to help preserve the

The best time to prune most trees for tree health is in the late dormant season (March & April in Minnesota). To minimize the spread of oak wilt, trees should *not* be pruned in April, May or June. For fireblight problems which show up on apples, crabapples, mountain ash and others in the



rose family, prune them when dormant in late winter. Honeylocust should be pruned when dormant or during dry conditions. Trees that "bleed" may be pruned in June-July if the "bleeding" is a concern. Maples, birches and nut trees fall into this category.

When pruning any branch, the cut should be made outside of the branch collar (see diagram above). Proper pruning will eliminate stubs and allow proper wound sealing.

There are several reasons not to prune trees, but two of

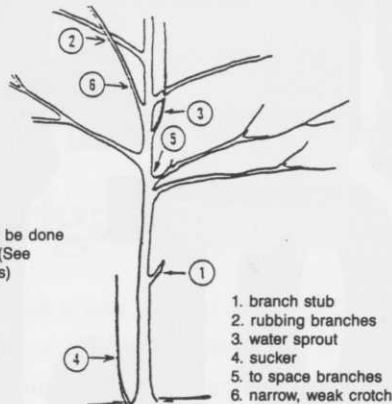
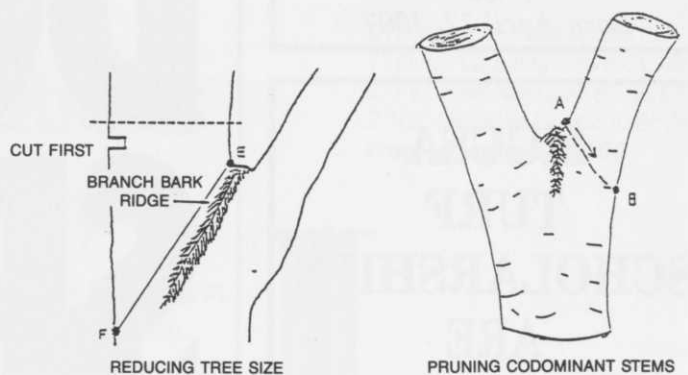


Fig. 1 Pruning that should be done on this young tree. (See numbers for reasons)

1. branch stub
2. rubbing branches
3. water sprout
4. sucker
5. to space branches
6. narrow, weak crotch

health of the plant. Diseased, dying or dead branches, injured branches, narrow angled crotches and watersprouts should all be removed. Hazardous branches should also be pruned. Any branches that interfere with pedestrian traffic and utilities fall into this category. (Remember, only qualified arborists should prune around electric lines.)

Pruning is really preventative maintenance. It is really critical on young trees to avoid problems before they exist. Too many young trees are improperly pruned, or in more cases not pruned at all, for several years. Then it becomes a major operation to remove bigger branches that will deform the tree. The following figure illustrates some potential problems to prune.



the most common are to thin out the crown and crown reduction or topping. Of these two bad practices, topping is by far the worst offender and is perhaps done the most often. Cutting off large vertical branches will allow decay organisms to enter the branches through the cut stems. Eventually, the tree may become hollow and considerably weakened. If a crown reduction is desired, branches should always be cut back just above a lateral branch as shown in the diagram at the right.

Remember, the best pruning job isn't judged by the size of the brush pile, and yearly pruning is much better than putting it off for several years.