

# PRUNING PROGRAMS REQUIRE ACCURATE SCHEDULE, MANAGEMENT

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Most facilities have living plants and anytime there are plants there is also a need for pruning. It is the responsibility of the grounds supervisor to develop a program which will provide proper pruning and at the right time for each of the different types of plants growing at his facility.

Instructions on how and when to prune are given in numerous publications. Scheduling work crews to perform pruning when it needs to be done and without interfering with other necessary chores must be done by the supervisor after a thorough analysis of the plant population. Type, number, age, general condition and locations of the plants are used as aids for the development of a pruning program.

A well-managed pruning program involves scheduling personnel, equipment, tools and handling of brush. It is also imperative the manager and crew know the names and identities of the various plants on the grounds. It is impossible to know when or how to prune if no one knows what is being pruned.

Postponing pruning until there is a slacking of other grounds work or until the foreman is looking for something for the crew to do to keep busy causes problems. The delay can turn a potentially hazardous situation into a real danger. It may be responsible for damage to property or injury to people or animals.

Allowing plants to grow completely out of bounds means that extensive cutting must be done to get the plant back to an acceptable size. The need for excessive pruning will often ruin the appearance of the plant until new growth covers bare spots. Sometimes, the plant's attractiveness is permanently ruined and it must be removed.

The best approach for pruning is to schedule it on a frequent basis. This prevents the need to remove a lot of wood and also allows the pruning crew to see the plants on a regular basis. Potential problems can be corrected before a hazard develops.

Scheduling on a calendar basis using the dates when pruning was done the preceding year is not completely valid because weather conditions modify blooming dates and when the flush of growth occurs. However, the dates when pruning is done should be recorded. They can serve as a reminder of when pruning needs to be done. Exact dates can be scheduled according to the growth pattern of the current year.

Winter months are a favorite time for pruning. The timing is fine for some plants, but winter pruning will remove buds from spring flowering shrubs. Also, it is difficult to find dead wood on plants in the winter.

The type of pruning to be done also influences the timing and scheduling. Pruning is normally done for the following reasons:

1. At the time of transplanting. Removing some of the top compensates for roots lost in transplanting. It helps the plant survive.

2. To remove dead, broken and diseased branches.

3. To keep the plant in bounds. Keep trees out of wires and shrubs from growing over sidewalks or windows.

4. For safety, to prevent plants from interfering with the view of stop signs and other regulatory and guidance signs. Also to prevent obstruction of the view at intersections and other hazardous areas.

5. To develop or maintain an espalier, topiary or other particular shape.

6. For rejuvenation. Old woody canes on shrubs often don't produce much flowering wood. Pruning some of the canes to the ground initiates new vigorous growth and doesn't harm the shape of the plants.

Pruning that involves the use of power equipment must be scheduled to avoid interference with classes, conferences and other activities being conducted at the facility. Schedules of some events are known well in advance. Problems with event scheduling may require doing the work on an overtime basis to avoid conflict. Emergency work must be done on an immediate basis regardless of the conflict. Noise and disturbance can be kept to a minimum if only the pruning to eliminate the danger is done with the final clearing and brush pickup deferred until the conflicting event is over.

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## A good time to inspect for pruning needs is after a rain.

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Pruning to clear areas for painters, electricians, and other crafts is often on an emergency basis. However, when routine work is involved the building maintenance supervisor should inform the grounds supervisor of his requirements when his yearly work schedule is developed. This will enable the grounds supervisor to schedule the special pruning with his regular pruning activity.

If practical, all pruning needs within an area should be scheduled at the same time to avoid return trips and to simplify clean up.

The overall pruning schedule has to include all of the special considerations plus the regular pruning.

Inspections will reveal pruning needs also. A good time to inspect is immediately after a rain. Tree branches are at their lowest and thus any need for pruning along roads, parking lots, and other traffic ways is readily apparent. Shrubs also are spread by the weight of water. Checking them while they are wet will indicate where pruning is needed to clear walks, background plantings and other features.

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Assigning personnel to do the job of pruning isn't necessary if the work is done by outside forces. Usually, much of the pruning can and should be done by the grounds crew. All of it can be done if the organization includes a tree crew.

You should not assign just anyone to prune. It is best to select a person with an interest in plants and who has shown he respects pruning techniques. Handing each member of the crew a pruner and telling him to start pruning creates confusion and makes it impossible for supervisors to direct their efforts to those that have the best likelihood of learning. In all situations, including the use of a commercial pruning firm, it is best for the supervisor to prune one plant as a model and to set the standard.

In-house pruning requires the purchase of chain saws and other pruning tools. Normally the cost is justified even if the tools are only used on an occasional basis. The greatest problem is inventory control. Pruning tools and small hand shears seem to disappear. Having a pruning crew reduces the need for many tools and gives control. The crew member should be responsible for his tools. The crew leader can make sure the crew members don't misplace or abuse the tools by using them for other tasks such as cutting wire and string. Tools should be stored in a way to protect cutting edges and to prevent theft.

Brush disposal is the last aspect of managing pruning activities. Chipping is the best procedure because it reduces volume, permits recycling of debris, and eliminates the need for a large brush pile. However, chippers are expensive and a truck with a high enclosed body is needed to transport the chipper and to hold the chips. Institutions with a pruning crew usually have a truck assigned to the crew. Facilities that don't generate enough brush should devise a portable solid side arrangement for a truck body. The sides can be removed when the truck is used for other purposes.

Good management with a chipper involves chipping brush where it is produced. Although noisy, the operation on location eliminates double handling, avoids untangling brush piles for chipping, and gets the brush chipped before it gets dry (dry wood dulls chipper blades).

If a brush pile is used, it should be located in an area that is relatively safe from fire hazards or unlikely to become a community dumping ground.

The storage area for chips also needs to be secure because chips have become a valuable commodity. Any excess chips can be made available to members of the institution. Chip service will make them more conscious of the grounds activities. Participating in the benefits derived from the grounds program will help increase the respect that people have for the program and will also be beneficial in getting approval of budget requests. **WTT**

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