

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

TREE/SHRUB PRUNING

(Acre)

Code 660

DEFINITION

Removing all or parts of selected branches or leaders from trees and shrubs.

Note: Pruning is removal of undesirable wood older than a year, such as diseased, dead, or damaged wood or forks. Shearing is cutting back the current year's growth of the leader and the laterals.

PURPOSE

- Improve the appearance of trees or shrubs, e.g., ornamental plants and Christmas trees.
- Improve the quality of wood products.
- Improve the production of plant products, e.g., nuts, fruits, boughs and tips.
- Reduce fire and/or safety hazards.
- Improve the growth and vigor of understory plants.
- Adjust the foliage and branching density for other specific intents, such as wind and snow control, noise abatement, access control, and visual screens.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On any area with trees or shrubs.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to all Purposes

The pruning and shearing method and timing will match the limitations of the site and soils, achieve purposes for the specific tree or shrub species, and be conducted in a safe and efficient manner.

Pruning or shearing will not adversely reduce the growth and vigor of the tree or shrub for the intended purpose.

Debris and vegetative material left on the site after treatment will not present an unacceptable

fire or pest hazard or interfere with the intended purpose and other management activities.

Comply with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations during the installation, operation and maintenance of this practice.

Pruning and shearing should be timed to minimize disturbance to seasonal wildlife activities.

Pruning and shearing tools should be disinfected to prevent the spread of pathogens.

To maintain plant growth and sustain vigor, pruning and shearing may be done in two or more timed intervals.

Time pruning and shearing to minimize potential damage to the tree bole and stems.

Deciduous trees, except elms, birch, dogwood, and maples may be pruned during any season. However, pruning early in the spring following full-leaf development allows one to visualize the effect the pruning will have on the appearance of the tree. The pruning wound will begin to heal immediately at this time of the year.

Elms, birch, dogwood, and maples should be pruned after the trees are in full leaf. Pruning these species in late winter or early spring causes profuse bleeding.

Additional Criteria to Improve the Quality of Wood Products

Commercial timber trees selected for pruning should be the better trees in the dominant and co-dominant crown classes. Any tree which is too crooked or too rough to prune should be removed during an intermediate cutting.

When trees reach 3 inches diameter at breast height (DBH), prune branches from the lower one-half of the tree. Pruning should be done during the dormant season, usually from October 15 to April 1.

CONSIDERATIONS

1. The estimated cost and projected economic benefit of the project should be reviewed before starting a pruning or shearing project.
2. Pruning may be practiced on nearly all species except eastern red cedar, and even it may be sheared when grown for Christmas trees.
3. Normally pruning is only recommended for high-value species.
4. Trees on recreational areas and near buildings may need pruning regardless of their size. Trees which have either recreational or esthetic value may be pruned in the same manner as those pruned for commercial wood products. The height to prune is generally the height necessary to allow pedestrian passage, vehicular traffic, and safe visibility.
5. Contrary to popular belief "top pruning" - that is, removing all limbs of a shade tree to give it a sheared or "balled" effect-is not a good practice. Rot and decay of the tree is accelerated.
6. Special consideration should be given to safety hazards when working in urban areas.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

Minimum documentation for this practice includes:

- Species to be pruned
- Method(s)
- Site limitations
- Season of the year to be performed
- Guides to pruning for the applicable purpose as needed
- Statement requiring compliance with all federal, state, and local laws
- Operation and maintenance requirements

Safety Note: Protective leg, knee, and thigh guards of metal, wire, mesh, or nylon fiber should be worn, especially when using shearing knives. Use safety goggles to avoid falling sawdust.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

- Periodically inspect plant condition and take additional actions as necessary, e.g., additional pruning, pest management, nutrient management, and forest stand improvement.
- Protect trees from fire and grazing.