

TREE/SHRUB PRUNING

660

Conservation Practice Fact Sheet
**DEFINITION**

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

PURPOSES

- Improve the appearance of trees or shrubs, e.g., ornamental plants and Christmas trees.
- Improve the quality of wood products.
- Improve the health and vigor of woody plants.
- 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

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abatement, access control, and visual screens.

BENEFITS

1. Improved aesthetics, quality, production, and growth.
2. Maximized economic return.
3. Increased noise abatement, access control, and screening.

WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

Anywhere pruning is needed or desired.

Prune only dominant or codominant trees which will be the future crop trees when pruning for timber production.

Do not remove more than 25% of the live tree canopy in one year. Use the two or three step pruning sequence to maintain 1/2 to 2/3 of the total tree height in living branches. Excessive pruning will reduce tree growth and make the trees susceptible to drought or insect attacks. A higher incidence of epicormic branching occurs in hardwood trees which have been pruned heavily.

Do not paint or treat pruning cuts.

Cutting into the branch collar, pruning flush to the trunk, or leaving a large stub may enhance tree decay and cause wood cracks and tissue dieback.

Dead branches should be pruned instead of broken off to help prevent the entry of disease organisms and to avoid discoloration of sound wood around the knot.

Improper pruning may reduce the value of the timber and cause trees/shrubs to be less healthy by increasing the incidence of disease or insect infestation.

TIMING OF PRUNING

To avoid attack by disease or insects, pruning of live branches will be limited to the dormant season (from the first frost to early March).

Do not prune oak species between budbreak and November 1 to reduce chances of spreading oak wilt disease.

Pruning should commence at a small tree size:

Method	DBH (In.)	Tree Height	Pruning Height
3-Step: a	3-5	15-20 ft	7-10 ft
b	4-5	25-30 ft	12-15 ft
c	5-8	35-40 ft	17-20 ft
2-Step: a	3-5	20-25 ft	10-12 ft
b	5-8	35-40 ft	17-20 ft

Black walnut or fruit trees may need to be pruned earlier than this to maintain the desired leader control.

Starting to prune trees that have reached 9 inches in DBH or larger is not practical for timber production purposes.

Trees in recreational areas, parks, etc., may need pruning for aesthetic or safety purposes regardless of their size.

Dead branches may be pruned at any time.

RECOMMENDED TOOLS FOR PRUNING

Use any appropriate, properly sharpened pruning tools including by-pass shears, chainsaws, pole saws, pruning saws, and bow saws.

Small branches and limbs (up to 1.5”) may be cut with a hand pruner or lopping shear. The by-pass style pruner is considered superior to the anvil style.

The preferred tool for cutting small and medium sized limbs (1.5” to 4” diameter) is a hand or pole saw with a curved blade having approximately 6-8 backward-facing teeth per inch that cut on the “pull” stroke.

Bow saws and chain saws are more appropriate for limbs larger than 4” in diameter.