

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

TREE/SHRUB PRUNING

(Acre)

CODE 660A

DEFINITION

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

PURPOSES

- Improve the intended function of the plant.
- Improve appearance of trees or shrubs.
- Improve the quality of the wood product.
- Reduce a fire and/or safety hazard.
- Improve the growth and vigor of understory plants.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On crop trees of high-value species (e.g. trees grown for select lumber, veneer or Christmas trees); on trees where removing all or parts of branches enhances the beauty and/or safety of an area; and to remove hazardous or diseased portions of trees.

CRITERIA

Prune trees according to the following steps:

1. Locate the branch bark ridge
2. Find **A** (outside edge of branch bark ridge).
3. Find **B** (swelling where branch meets branch collar. If **B** is difficult to determine drop a line from **A**: the angle **XAC** is equal to the angle **XAB** (see figure 1). Stub the branch to be pruned using a first cut from below and a second cut from above.
4. Make the final cut on line **AB**.
5. Do not cut behind the branch bark ridge.
6. Do not leave stubs.
7. Do not cut into the branch collar.

Timing of shearing, branch removal and corrective pruning of high value tree species will

be described to accomplish the intended purpose.

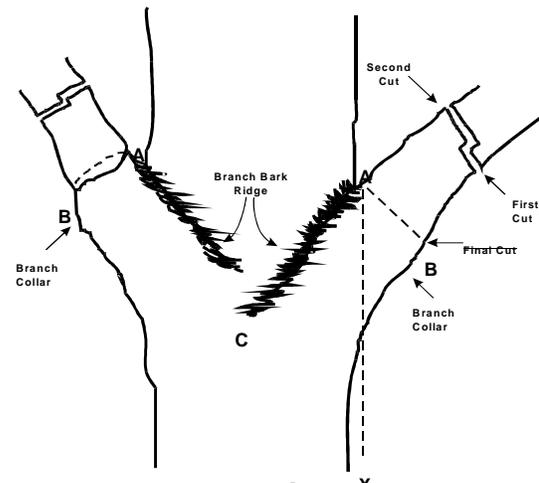


Figure 1. — Hardwood pruning

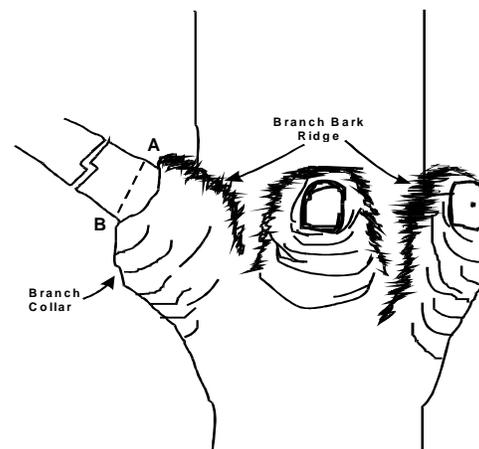


Figure 2. — Conifer pruning.

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 laws and regulations including per-activity permits, permissions, or notifications.

CONSIDERATIONS

The timing of pruning should consider the nesting and breeding requirements of arboreal species.

In urban areas special considerations need to be given for safety hazards.

Disinfect pruning and shearing tools as needed to prevent the spread of pathogens.

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

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation. Species, site limitations, methods, equipment, season of year, and guides to pruning for the applicable purpose shall be considered. Separate specifications for improvement of Lumber Quality, Aesthetics/Ornamentals and Christmas Trees are provided in Attachment 1.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Periodically inspect plant condition and take corrective actions as necessary, e.g., additional pruning, pest management, nutrient management, and forest stand improvement.

ATTACHMENT 1

NEW HAMPSHIRE SUPPLEMENTAL SPECIFICATIONS

1. IMPROVEMENT OF LUMBER QUALITY

- Species – On good to excellent sites, any species of hardwood or softwood may be pruned when it is considered economically prudent. In general, pruning is limited to white pine and to a lesser extent, red pine (for poles). White and red pine may be pruned on outwash soils rated fair to excellent for productivity.
- Size – Trees 3 to 8 inches DBH (diameter at breast height or 4.5 feet above the ground) and 12 feet or more in height may be pruned. Trees as large as 10 " DBH may be pruned on good to excellent sites if they are to be grown to 20" DBH or larger.
- Number – Up to 150 well-distributed dominant and codominant crop trees per acre may be pruned. Select good quality, vigorous, reasonably straight trees.
- Length of Bole Pruned – Pruning will be done in order to produce 8-16 feet sawlogs in two-foot, even increments i. e., 8', 10', 12', 14', and 16' logs. One additional foot of bole will be pruned to allow for stump and trim allowances.
- Method – Limbs will be cut as close to the bole as possible without injuring or removing the collar of tissue at the base of the branch (branch collar). Live branches greater than 2" diameter will not be removed. Dead branches of any size may be pruned.
- From 1/3 to 1/2 of total tree height will always be left in live crown.
- Pruning saws are preferable when pruning for improved lumber quality. However, any tool may be used which removes the branch and does not

leave a stub or damage the branch collar.

- Time to Prune – Pruning of softwoods may be done anytime. However, dormant season is usually preferable. Hardwoods should be pruned only during the dormant season.
- Other Considerations – Thinning must be performed prior to or shortly after pruning to promote fast growth and healing of wounds.
- To prevent wind damage, trees along the windward edge of a stand should not be pruned (or thinned).
- Use of tree pruning paint is not necessary or recommended because of labor and cost factors. The value of painting is aesthetics.

2. AESTHETICS/ORNAMENTALS

- Remove diseased, dead and dying limbs. Also remove any crossing branches on young trees and shrubs.
- Remove limbs which are a hazard to the public. In areas of human use such as campgrounds, they are to be removed to a height of 8 feet. On bridle paths, limbs are to be removed to a height of 12 feet. On snowmobile or cross-country ski trails limbs are pruned to a height of 8 feet.
- Remove tree limbs which interfere with the growth of flowering shrubs.
- Remove limbs which interfere with the viewing of a scenic area.
- Tree limbs will be cut flush with the branch collar (see 1), or at an angle to allow water to drain. Large limbs are to

be undercut to prevent peeling or stripping of the tree's bark.

- For deciduous shrubs, it is important to cut slightly above a bud with the cut sloping away from it at a gentle angle. When hard pruning, cut growth down to new growing points at the woody base of the shrub.
- Removing one-third of old growth, or of wood which has flowered in the previous season, encourages vigorous flowering and rejuvenation of older shrubs.
- Certain young shrubs needing time to become established will gain a more compact shape and finer foliage if the previous year's growth is cut back by half in early spring.
- A broken, jagged limb 3-6" beyond branch collar will usually result in a cavity which may result in improved habitat for cavity nesting birds and animals.
- Cut limbs are to be removed, chipped for wood mulch, lopped so they lie close to the ground, or used to construct brush piles for wildlife. Fall Balsam Fir pruning can be used for making wreaths, etc. (also known as "tipping").
- Use of tree wound dressing or "pruning paint" is not necessary but may be desirable for aesthetics.

3. CHRISTMAS TREES

- Trees planted for Christmas trees are sheared and basal pruned to enhance their appearance and increase sale value. Trees are sheared to develop the desired shape and density (usually an inverted cone and moderately dense).
- Pruning for pines is to be done in late spring after elongation is nearly complete, while the leader is soft and succulent. Approximately one-half of the new growth is removed. Spruce and fir may be pruned anytime of the year.
- Multiple leaders are to be removed when shearing. Leave only one strong leader.
- Leaders are usually cut back 12 to 14 inches for pines and 8 to 12 inches for spruce and fir. Spruce should be cut back to within approximately 1/4 to 3/8 inches of a single live bud.
- After final shearing, trees are to be allowed to grow one season before harvest.
- Any tool may be used which produces a clean cut without tearing the branch or stripping the bark. Examples are: hand clippers, hedge trimmers, various knives, and sickles.