

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

TREE/SHRUB PRUNING

(Ac.)

CODE 660

DEFINITION

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

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, bough and tips.
- Reduce fire and/or safety hazards.
- Improve the growth and vigor of woody plants.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on any area with trees or shrubs.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Pruning and shearing 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.

Minimize damage to the residual tree bole/stems and limbs by utilizing the proper pruning procedure(s) and tools.

Minimize tree stress when removing a high degree of crown foliage by:

- Pruning in two or more timed intervals.
- Pruning can begin at any time and earlier pruning is quicker and easier to accomplish. Early pruning is beneficial in shaping the tree or shrub too.
- Remove only 25 percent or less of the live canopy in any one year.

Debris and vegetative material left on the site will not present a fire hazard.

Disease or insect infested materials, left on site, will be properly treated to minimize re-infection or will be removed and disposed of.

Burning of removed vegetation shall follow the criteria and considerations listed in the Prescribed Burning (338).

Ground vegetation and/or conditions must be left in a manner to address erosion and other natural resource concerns to acceptable levels.

Disinfect pruning and shearing tools to minimize the spread of pathogens.

<p>Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact your Natural Resources Conservation Service State Office or visit the Field Office Technical Guide.</p>

**NRCS, NHCP
March 2013**

CONSIDERATIONS

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

Review the estimated cost and projected economic benefits before starting a pruning or shearing project.

Branches removed may be used for other products.

When pruning for mistletoe control also consider existing tree spacing, degree of mistletoe infection, stand age, and site quality.

Consider possible sun scald damage, especially on south facing slopes, that may occur to newly exposed tree bole.

Reducing the amount of live canopy may reduce tree growth. Consider the affect of the planned canopy removal.

When pruning for fire hazard reduction pruned branch height (at the bole) may need to be higher with trees whose branches droop, to achieve the desired space separation from ground vegetation.

Limit pruning activities to the dormant season for live branches (first frost to early March) except: Prune oak trees from early November up until budbreak to reduce the spread of oak wilt disease; Maples, boxelders, elms, birch, black walnut and honeylocust will bleed if pruned in winter, prune these species after they are fully leafed out in late spring; prune trees that bloom on old wood immediately after blooming (forsythia, lilac, viburnum, mockorange and spirea); prune evergreens from spring through early summer after new growth has hardened off.

Dead limbs may be pruned at any time.

Cutting into the branch collar, pruning flush to the trunk or leaving a branch stub may enhance tree decay and create openings for insects and disease.

Topping trees or cutting off the ends of branches are improper pruning techniques and should be avoided.

Care must be taken to avoid injury to the stem through tearing or wounding the bark during pruning.

Large branches should be removed in a 3 step process. First – away from the tree bole make an undercut on the limb to be removed. Second- cut down from the top on the outside of the first undercut. These cuts will remove the limb and its weight. Now make the third cut just outside of the branch collar to complete the process.

Do not prune with hatchets, axes or machetes to avoid injury to the tree or shrub. Better choices for pruning tools include limb saws, pruning saws, shears, loppers and similar tools.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

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

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Periodically inspect plant condition and do additional pruning if needed.

Control locally invasive and noxious plants that may establish due to increased light penetration.

REFERENCES

A New Tree Biology. Shigo and Trees, Associates; 1986.

Care for Your Trees. Univ. of Illinois, Circular 1059. 1972.

Christmas Trees – A Management Guide. Univ. of Nebraska, EC 76-1741. 1976.

Pruning Forest Trees. UMC Forestry Guide No. 5160. 1989.

Shaping Pine Christmas Trees for Quality. UMC Forestry Guide No. 5706. 1972.

Windell, Keith. 1996. Pruning in timber stands. Tech. Report 9624-2815 MTDC. USFS, Missoula Technology and Development Center