

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE  
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

**TREE/SHRUB PRUNING**

(Acre)

CODE 660

**DEFINITION**

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

*Pruning should be done during the dormant season (late fall after leaf fall through mid winter). Never prune during the fast growing season of late spring or early summer.*

**PURPOSES**

- Improve appearance of trees or shrubs, e.g., ornamental plants and Christmas trees.
- Improve the quality of the 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.

*Use a pruning saw to remove limbs. Do not cut the stub flush with the tree. Cut just outside the branch collar. See Figure 1.*

*Prune trees when less than 10" DBH and preferably less than 6" DBH. Remove lower limbs less than 2 inches in diameter, and preferably 1 inch in diameter.*

*Never prune more than half the tree's total height or more than 20 percent of the live crown in one growing season.*

*The first pruning should be at least 9 feet if possible, but if practical and within the guidelines for the statement above, prune to 17 feet.*

*Pruning should be restricted to no more than 100 crop trees per acre.*

*Corrective terminal pruning may be done at any age prior to side-limb pruning.*

***Pruning Conifers for High Quality Wood Products*** - Prune white and red pine where site index is greater than 65. Prune Norway spruce where site index is greater than 75.

*Conifers may be pruned during any season, however, late summer, fall, and early winter are recommended.*

**CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES**

On any area with trees or shrubs.

*Use a pruning saw to remove limbs. Do not cut the stub flush with the tree. Cut just outside the branch collar. See Figure 2.*

**CRITERIA**

***Pruning Black Walnut for High Quality Wood Products*** - Prune black walnut and other hardwoods where site index is greater than 75.

*Do not remove more than the lower half of the live branches at any one time.*

The first pruning should be applied when the trees are 20 to 30 feet in height. Remove branches 7-9 feet in height. Plan later operations to remove branches to 17 feet limiting pruning to two operations. Attempt to prune branches before they become 1 ½ inches in diameter.

Only potential crop trees should be pruned. In the average pine plantation, 100 – 150 crop trees should be selected for pruning.

All slash should be loped to no more than 2 feet above the ground to reduce fire hazard and stimulate decomposition.

Prune trees according to the following steps:

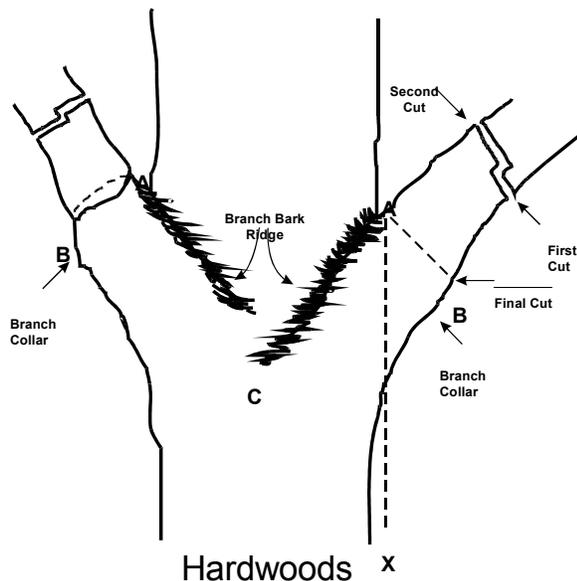
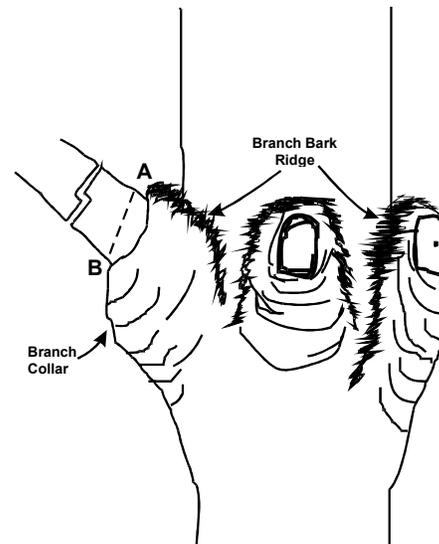


Figure 1. — Hardwood pruning (see figure 2 for conifer pruning).



Conifers

Figure 2. — Conifer pruning.

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.

**Pruning / Shearing to Improve the Quality of Christmas Trees** - the growing of Christmas trees is a specialized business. These specifications are general in nature. "Christmas Tree Culture and Marketing", WVU-CES, Publication 525 is a

good source of information regarding the culture and care of Christmas trees.

**Shearing** - Most Christmas trees are sheared annually beginning when trees are around 2 feet tall. Shear pines between early June and mid-July before new growth hardens. Spruces and firs, including Douglas-fir, maybe sheared during the dormant season, August to April. Make cuts just above a single bud. Start pruning Scotch pine when new needle growth is  $\frac{3}{4}$  as long as last years needle growth.

### **Reducing Leader Growth**

**Spruce or fir** – Select a group or cluster of buds (4 or more) at a point about 12 inches above the last whorl. These will form a false whorl the next season and increase density. At least 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches above this group of buds (or false whorl), select a strong bud. Cut the terminal leader about 1/8" above the bud and at a 45 degree angle. Remove any buds between the tip and false whorl. Cut back several inches of the upper branch tips to prevent them from turning up to become leaders.

**Pines** – Cut leader off at 45 degree angle to encourage the formation of a single strong leader bud on the high point of the cut. Leader growth should be about 12 inches. The top whorl should be cut back about 40 percent as long as the sheared leader to prevent the tips from turning up as new leader growth. This should be done at the same time as shearing.

**Basal Pruning** – Unwanted branches between the bottom of the Christmas tree and ground can be removed. The selected basal whorl should be as low as practical, but still provide the needed handle. If wildlife management is a landowner objective this practice may be in conflict with suggested practices – See Wildlife Upland Management – Code 645.

### **Pruning to Improve the Aesthetics of an Area or for the Reduction of Fire Hazard**

– Remove limbs to any height necessary. Pruning practices may be in conflict with wildlife management objectives. See Wildlife Upland Management Standard – Code 645.

### **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.

*Pruning practices may be in conflict with wildlife management objectives. See Wildlife Upland Management Standard – Code 645.*

### **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.

*Requirements for operation and maintenance of the practice shall be incorporated into site specifications.*

*The following will be identified in the conservation plan narrative (as appropriate):*

*Purpose*

*Species*

*Site Limitations*

*Methods*

*Equipment*

*Number of trees*

*Pruning Height*

*Season (Dates)*

*Operation and Maintenance Plan.*

## **OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE**

Reinspection and re pruning as needed for the prescribed purposes.

## **REFERENCES**

*Black Walnut As A Crop, USDA-USFS, General Technical Report NC-4, 1973.*

*Christmas Tree Culture and Marketing, WVU-CES, Publication 525.*

*Forest Management Handbook, West Virginia Division of Forestry, 1985.*

*Forest Management Update, Arlyn Perkey, USDA-USFS, Morgantown, WV, No. 4, September 1985.*

*Growing Walnut for Profit and Pleasure, American Walnut Manufacturing Association.*

*Time studies of Hand and Power Pruning Crop Trees in Plantations, W.A. Lemmien, V.J. Rudolph, Journal of Forestry, June 1963.*