

Tree and Shrub Care

A Practical Guide
to Pruning

The Tree Line

Manitoba
Natural Resources
Forestry



INTRODUCTION

Your trees and shrubs need special care to ensure desirable growth and to protect them from various insect and disease problems. There are several tree care techniques that can be performed by home owners with some simple directions. This pamphlet outlines the essentials of pruning your trees and shrubs.

PRUNING

Pruning is the practice of cutting back plant growth at various stages and times to improve plant health, vigour, appearance, usefulness and safety. Pruning requires special attention be paid to the following:

- Plan all cuts thoughtfully, taking into consideration the overall appearance of the plant when finished.
- Make all cuts carefully, to allow the cut surface to heal naturally.
- The best time to prune most trees and shrubs is during the dormant season; mid-October (after leaf drop) to approximately the end of April. This allows new growth to develop fully and to mature or harden-off before the growing season ends.

Pruning can give you a healthier, better-looking plant. Moderate pruning can lead to a more vigorous plant with larger blossoms and greater fruit production. Severe pruning can kill a plant therefore is not recommended. A general rule of thumb is to remove not more than 30% of a plant in any one year.

Species such as birch and maple are "bleeders"; that is, they are very susceptible to heavy sap loss if cut in spring. This can be annoying and unsightly. The best time to prune these plants is from late spring (after the leaves have reached normal size) to early fall.

There are two distinct classifications of trees and shrubs. Pruning techniques for these groups differ significantly due to their growth habits.

Deciduous, or hardwood trees, shed leaves every year (e.g., basswood, maple, ash, poplar, oak, spires).

Coniferous, or softwoods, have needles or scale-like leaves, often bearing cones (e.g., spruce, pine, juniper and cedar).

PRUNING DECIDUOUS TREES

Heading Back

This is the pruning practice of cutting a stem or branch just above a bud, or cutting a lateral branch to the next main stem. See diagram 1.

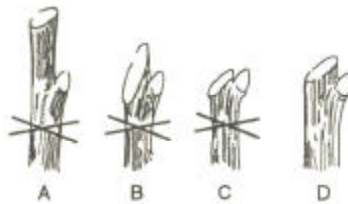


Diagram 1

Heading back should be done at a young age to train and develop the structural growth of the tree. Heading back is done at transplanting time to compensate for roots lost during the planting process. Do not remove more than one-third of a branch.

Shearing

Shearing is a form of heading back to shape and control size of shrubs into symmetrical, compact

forms. This is a high maintenance practice, as it must be done several times a year.

Only the newer outer growth can be removed. Cutting back into the older growth will result in a void of green foliage which may not grow back. When cutting hedges, the upper portion should be groomed so that it is narrower than the bottom. This allows sunlight to reach all of the foliage area.

Thinning

Thinning is the selective removal or shortening of branches at their point of origin, to increase light penetration and air movement in the crown of the tree. Dead, diseased, rubbing and weakly attached branches are best removed using this technique.

Removing Large Tree Limbs

Removing heavy branches requires that care be taken to avoid tearing the bark or wood from the tree trunk as the branch falls. This should be done in three steps as per Diagram 2.



Diagram 2

1. The first step is to cut into the branch on the lower side, about 30 cm from the trunk of the tree. The cut is made about 1/4 of the way through or until the saw begins to bind.
2. Next, cut into the top side of the branch about half way through. This cut is made about 45 cm from the trunk of the tree and will allow the branch to break along the fault line. The branch will fall free from the tree.
3. Finally, removing the remaining stub close to the trunk as shown in Diagram 3. This cut must be made at the outside edge of the branch collar. Flush cuts should not be made as they reduce the plants ability to heal rapidly.

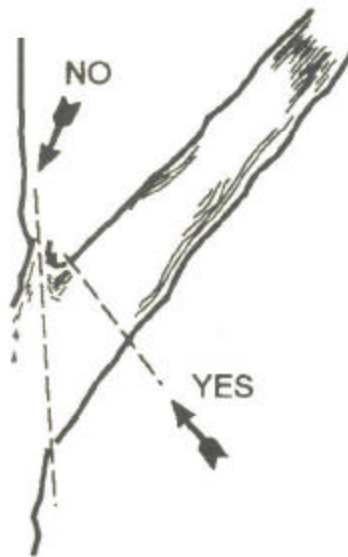


Diagram 3

Pollarding

Pollarding is the arbitrary cutting of a shrub or tree as opposed to cutting at the site of a bud or branch. This practice is **not** recommended. It is unhealthy for the plant, and may cause unsightly gaps in foliage or a proliferation of vegetative growth. Pollarding is particularly harmful when major limbs are removed to restrict tree height. See Diagram 4.

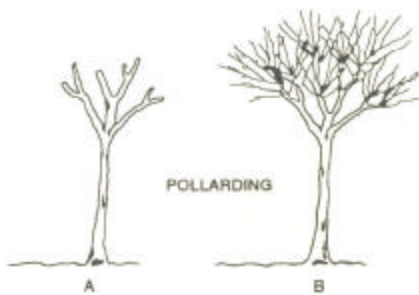


Diagram 4

PRUNING CONIFERS

When pruning conifers it is important to recognize two distinct groups. The first group includes spruce, pine and fir trees; those with a distinct whorled branching pattern. These trees seldom need pruning except for corrective pruning where damage has occurred.

The second group of conifers includes cedar and juniper. They have a growth pattern similar to deciduous trees and shrubs which allows more freedom in the manner and style you wish to prune.

Spruce, Pine and Fir

Seldom can a branch from this group be pruned without an unsightly gap remaining. Dead branches should be completely removed. These trees do not generate new growth with the same vigour as deciduous trees. Tip pruning — pinching off new growth — is the most effective method to control size and increase density. Whether you are pruning to direct growth or increase density, confine pruning to new growth early in spring.



Diagram 5

Cedars and Junipers

Pruning cedars and junipers requires special attention not to cut behind the green growth. They should be pruned every three years by either thinning or heading back.



CEDARS & JUNIPERS

The best care you can give your tree is to make a good, clean, proper cut. Always keep wounds as small as possible to minimize injury.

It is very important to ensure all wounds will heal quickly. When pruning a tree with fireblight or other diseases, pruning tools must be disinfected between cuts with alcohol or other disinfectant. Painting wounds does not speed up healing, as is commonly thought. Products such as paint or shellacs are toxic to trees, and may promote rot.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CALL

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