When to prune

The late dormant season is best for most pruning. Pruning in late winter, just before spring growth starts, leaves fresh wounds exposed for only a short length of time before new growth begins the wound sealing process. Another advantage of dormant pruning is that it's easier to make pruning decisions without leaves obscuring branch structure. Pruning at the proper time can avoid certain disease and physiological problems.

To avoid **oak wilt** disease, **DO NOT** prune oaks during spring or fall.

To avoid likelihood of **stem cankers**, prune honey locusts when they are dormant in late winter. If they must be pruned in summer, avoid rainy/humid weather conditions.

Prune apple trees, crabapples, and hawthorns in late winter. Spring or summer pruning increases chances of **fireblight**, a bacterial disease. Autumn or early winter pruning is likely to result in drying and dieback.

Some trees "bleed" sap after late winter or early spring pruning. This bleeding causes little harm. To prevent bleeding, prune after leaves are fully expanded in late spring or early summer. Never remove more than 1/4 of the live foliage. Examples include: maple, box elder, butternut, walnut, birch, and ironwood.

Trees and shrubs that **bloom early** in the growing season on last year's growth should be pruned immediately after they finish blooming.

Trees and shrubs that **bloom on new growth** may be pruned in spring before growth begins.

Services provided by Hot Springs Urban Forestry

Public Rights-of-Way

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Tree Removal
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Fertilizing
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Tree Inspections
Insect/Disease Diagnosis
Tree Related Questions

Contact information

Bob Lathrop
Urban Forester

City Hall
Public Works Department
133 Convention Boulevard
Hot Springs, AR 71901

Office (501) 321.6959
Cell (501) 622.8197
blathrop@cityhs.net

URBAN FORESTRY HOW-TO SERIES

HOW TO PRUNE TREES

City of Hot Springs
Urban Forestry Division

Why to prune

Prune to promote plant health. Remove dead, dying, diseased, insect infested, and mechanical damage. Remove stubs and branches that rub together.

Prune to maintain intended purpose, such as flower and fruit development, dense hedge, or desired tree form.

Prune to improve appearance. Natural form is best. Prune to control size and proportion, or to remove unwanted branches, water-spouts, and suckers.

Prune to protect people and property. Remove dead, hazardous, weak or narrow-angled branches. Eliminate interference with vision, street lights, traffic signals, and overhead wires. DO NOT prune near electrical wires.

Types of pruning

Crown Thinning: Selectively removing branches throughout the top. This promotes better form and health by increasing light penetration and air movement. The emphasis is on removing weak branches and structural defects.

Crown Raising: Removing lower branches to allow more clearance above lawns, sidewalks, streets, and the like.

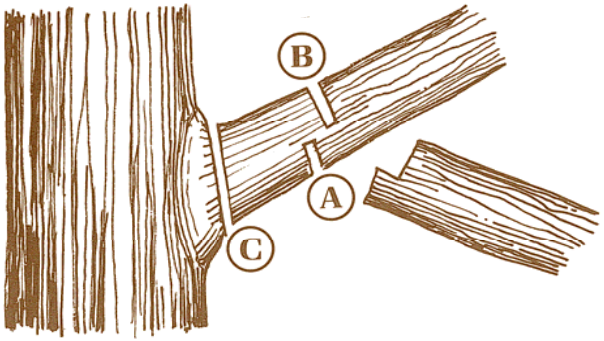
Crown Reduction: Removing larger branches at the top of the tree to reduce its height. Crown reduction pruning is different from topping because branches are removed immediately above lateral branches, leaving no stubs. Crown reduction should be done only when absolutely necessary.

How to prune

The cut is the key to good pruning. As a rule, always cut back to a branch, twig or bud that is pointed in the direction you want the tree to grow. This encourages controlled, healthy new growth. If you're unsure whether to remove a branch, don't cut. You can always cut it later, but you can never put it back.

A 'branch collar' is located where each branch connects to the trunk. If you cut into the collar, you will interfere with the tree's natural defenses, allowing the entry of disease and insect pests. Make your pruning cut outside the collar on the branch side without leaving a stub.

Removing large limbs requires three cuts to avoid stripping bark from the trunk. Make the first cut (A) into the underside of the limb about 6 inches beyond the bark collar, cutting 1/4 to 1/3 upward through the limb. Make the second cut (B) from the top downward several inches farther out than the first cut, cutting until the branch breaks away. With the weight of the branch removed, a third cut (C) removes the stub.



Pruning tools

The right tools make pruning easier and help you do a good job. Keep tools well-maintained and sharp. The following pruning tools will suffice for most applications.

A good pair of **pruning shears** is one of the most important tools. Cuts up to 3/4 inches in diameter may be made.

Lopping shears are pruning shears with long handles to provide greater leverage needed to cut branches up to *1 1/2"* in diameter.

Hedge shears are meant only for pruning succulent or small stem hedges.

Hand saws are for cutting branches exceeding 1 inch in diameter. Many types are available. Special tri-cut or razor tooth pruning saws cut through larger branches up to 4 inches in diameter.

Pole saws allow for extended reach with a long handle, but they must be used carefully to achieve clean cuts.

Small **chain saws** are for use on larger branches. Wear protective clothing and exercise caution. Never use chain saws to reach above your shoulders, or when on a ladder.

When plants are pruned well, it is difficult to see that they have been pruned!