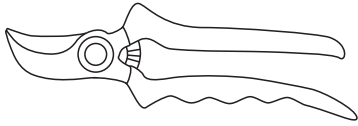
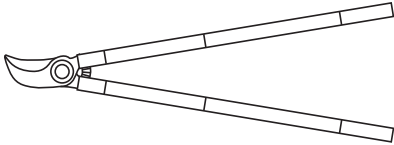


# Basic Pruning Guidelines

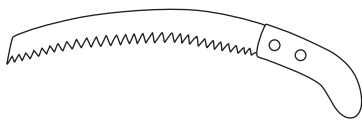
## Use the correct tools



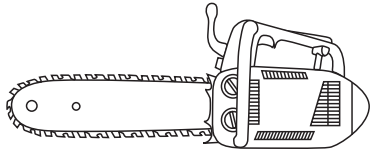
Hand pruners are useful for small branches, up to about 1/2-inch diameter. Use loppers or a saw for larger branches or for species with hardwood.



Long-handled loppers may be used to remove larger-diameter branches, but precise cuts are more difficult to make.



Curved-blade pruning saws cut on the pull stroke. Newer blade designs are able to cut large and small diameter branches quickly and cleanly. Pruning saws are available with fixed or folding blades, or mounted on a pole. Larger pruning saws are sometimes used by professionals.



Chainsaws are not recommended for general pruning, except by professionals as a time saver. (Consider hiring an arborist for large or potentially dangerous work.)

## Timing is important

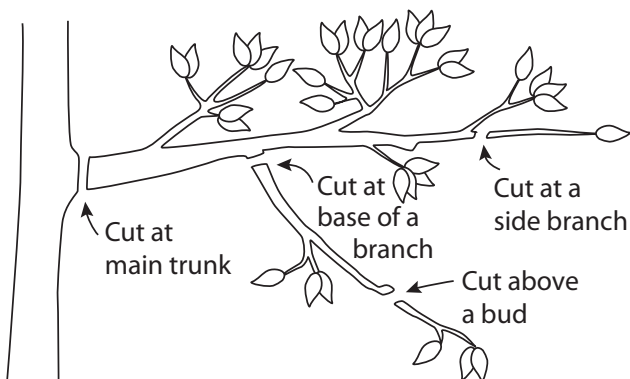
To minimize damage and synchronize with the natural growth cycle, prune in winter (January, February). Avoid heavy pruning as leaves are expanding in early spring (April, May), when tree energy reserves are low. Timing for light pruning is less critical. For maximum display of spring flowering species, prune after bloom (June or later). Prune dead limbs and branches at any time.

J F M A M J J A S O N D

Best Time	●	●										●
Worst Time				●	●							
Light Pruning	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●

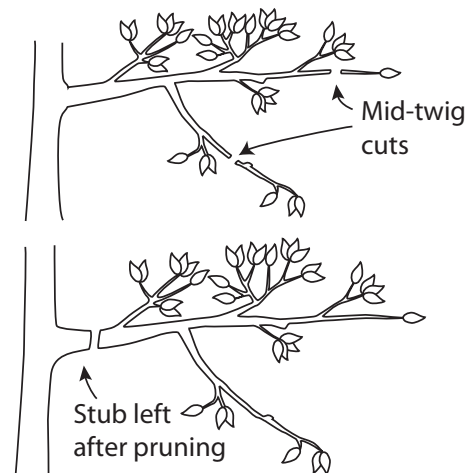
## Remove whole limbs or branches

**YES**



Always cut back to the main trunk, base of a branch or above a bud. This technique respects natural growth patterns.

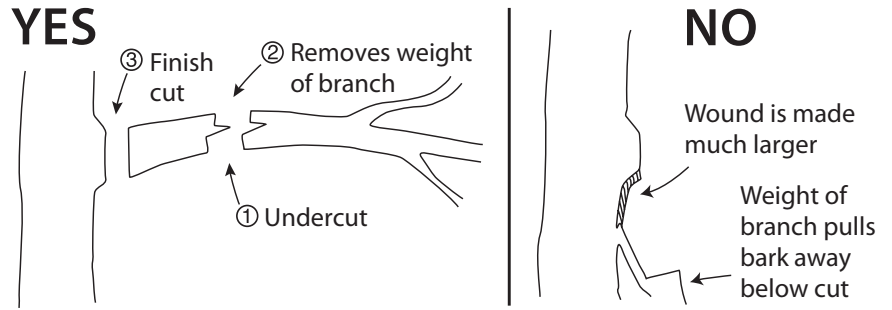
**NO**



Do not leave a stub. Do not cut in the middle of a branch or twig. Pruning in this manner creates entry points for decay and pests.

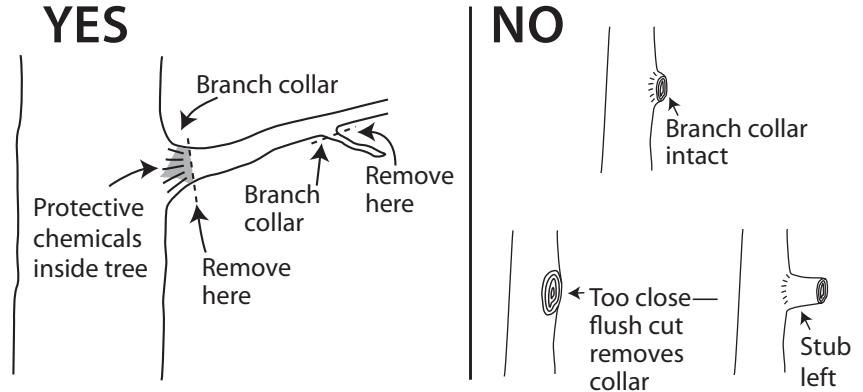
## Use the three-cut method

Branches 1 inch in diameter or larger generally should be removed in a series of three cuts. This will prevent bark attached to the base of the cut branch from stripping away bark on the trunk as it falls.



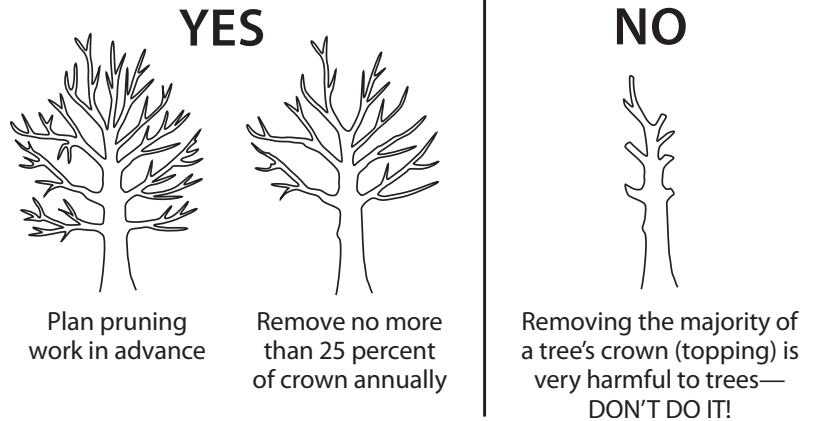
## Save branch collars

Trees produce natural chemicals to prevent decay from entering the tree at the base of each branch or limb. To preserve this chemical zone, leave the slight swelling, or branch collar, at the branch base. The resulting wound will be smaller than if the branch were cut flush. This rule applies to large limbs and small branches.



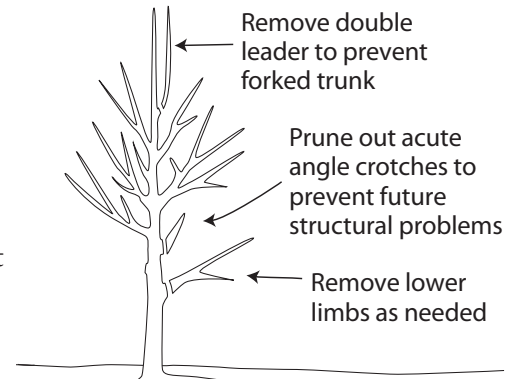
## Don't overprune

It is best to remove only a small percentage of the live part of a tree at one time—a maximum of 25 percent in one year for healthy, vigorous trees. This will help maintain a balance between leaf area and other tree functions. Prune weak or declining trees less. Severe pruning may stimulate undesirable sprouting from the stem or roots. Avoid pruning more than 25 percent of the live crown annually of any tree two years in succession.



## Prune now and avoid future problems

Use simple hand-pruning tools when a tree is young to prevent future structural problems and the need to remove large limbs later in its life. It is especially important to remove forked tops (double leaders), and to gradually remove lower branches for shade-tree development. Prune out acute angle (tight V) crotches to prevent future structural problems. Contrary to what some people believe, a tree's branches always remain at the height at which they began. So prune problem branches when small, because they will not "grow up and out of your way."



Missouri Department of Conservation  
P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180  
www.MissouriConservation.org  
1/2010 F00071

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs of the Missouri Department of Conservation is available to all individuals without regard to their race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability. Questions should be directed to the Department of Conservation, P.O. Box 180, Jefferson City, MO 65102, (573) 751-4115 (voice) or 800-735-2966 (TTY), or to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Division of Federal Assistance, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop: MBSP-4020, Arlington, VA 22203.