

Pruning For Healthy Plants

Ed Milhous

25 rules of thumb

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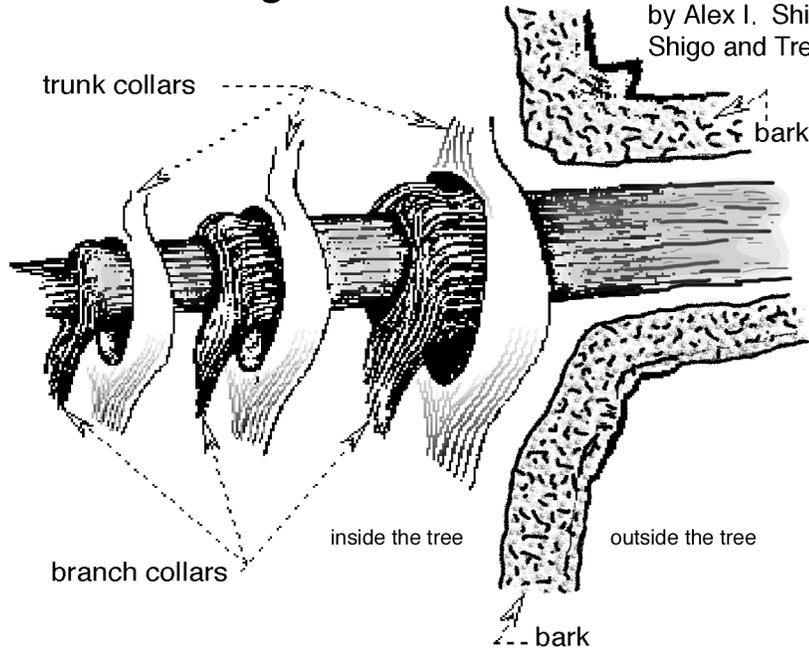
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1	If you aren't sure how, when, and where to prune a plant, it's probably best to leave it alone... it may not be possible to fix poor pruning later.	15	Always use the right tool for the job at hand.
2	Do not leave stubs... <i>always</i> cut back to a leader or branch that is at least one-third the size of the branch being cut.	16	Pruning paint is useful in only a very few situations, and will not overcome injuries resulting from improper pruning techniques.
3	Do not flush-cut... such a wound allows decay to enter the dominant stem you are trying to preserve, and results in cracks years later.	17	If you are pruning a plant over and over <i>just</i> to control its size, it is probably the wrong plant for the situation; removal may be a very good option
4	If a part of a plant is in the way, cutting it off completely is usually better than cutting it back.	18	Don't wait until the plant is too big to begin thinking about size-reduction pruning.
5	Do not cut the tops off trees, even small trees.	19	Prune out any part that is dead or dying; it may be best to remove unhealthy plants from a planting.
6	<i>Never</i> work within ten feet of a power line.	20	Do not count on shearing alone to control the size of a shrub... periodic thinning is necessary to keep sheared plants both healthy and under control.
7	<i>Never</i> climb more than ten feet off the ground to prune without a rope and saddle... and the training to know how to use the equipment safely.	21	Time the pruning of flowering shrubs so that: •if it flowers on new (i.e., this year's) growth, prune it in winter or early spring before it grows; •if it flowers on old (i.e., a previous year's) growth, prune it right after it flowers; •if it's an evergreen not being grown for flowers, prune it in late winter or early spring; •if renewing the plant, cut it to within inches of the ground in late winter, or right after it flowers.
8	<i>Is it your plant?</i> <i>Never</i> prune any plant unless you have the owner's permission first.	22	With trees, follow American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A-300 standards for tree care.
9	Always use the "three-cut method" to prune any branch you cannot easily support with one hand.	23	For qualified help when hiring a pro, insist that an International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist be on site while your trees are worked on.
10	Avoid pruning a plant from bud-break until leaves have hardened off in spring.	24	With trees, almost never should more than 25% of the green tissue be removed in a single season.
11	Avoid pruning when leaves are falling in autumn.	25	With trees, 50% of the green tissue should be evenly distributed over the lower two-thirds of the tree's crown, and each individual branch.
12	Do not clean or shape wounds on plants.		
13	Pruning cuts are wounds; all wounds remain with a plant for its entire life. However, proper pruning techniques improve plant health and add to a conscientious <i>Plant Health Care</i> program.		
14	Keep your tools sharp... dull tools cause plant damage and often lead to accidents.		

"Proper pruning is one of the best things you can do for your trees; improper pruning is one of the worst things that can happen to a tree." Alex Shigo

Branch Diagram

from *Tree Pruning A World Photo Guide*
by Alex I. Shigo
Shigo and Trees Associates, 1989

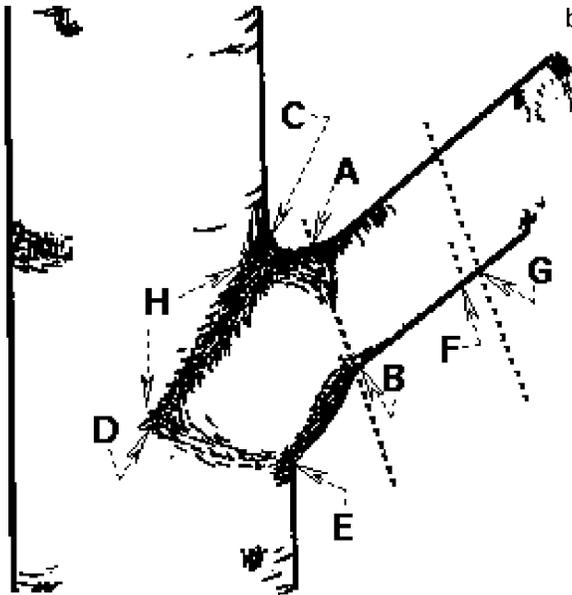


Branch collars are where the tree's protection system is. When pruning, avoid damaging collars. Make pruning cuts just outside the collar, even if this results in a lump or bump on the side of the tree.

An exploded view, inside the tree, showing growth of three years of collars

Natural Target Pruning

from *Tree Pruning A World Photo Guide*
by Alex I. Shigo
Shigo and Trees, Associates, 1989



The three-cut method:

1. Locate the branch bark ridge (H) and the branch collar (A to C and B to E)
2. Stub-cut the branch by cutting up at F and then down at G
3. Locate points A and B, where the branch meets the branch collar
4. Cut, *with care*, from A to B or from B to A

After a few weeks of growth has occurred, check the cut you made. If it was done correctly, the pattern of woundwood (some people call it "callous") will look like this:



But, if you missed the target, the woundwood will look like one of these patterns:

