



earth-wise guide to

# Pruning

improper pruning methods can lead to plants that are weakened or deformed. increase your knowledge of proper pruning techniques to improve the health, beauty, and value of your landscape.

## reasons for pruning—

- To train a new plant
- To maintain plant health
- To improve the quality of flowers, fruit, foliage or stems
  - To restrict growth



A well pruned live oak tree.

## 1. Select the proper plant for the location

- Check the plant's maximum size; avoid those that will outgrow the space
- Select plant species and varieties that require minimal pruning

## 2. Plan before you prune

- First remove all dead, broken, diseased or problem limbs by cutting them at the point of origin or back to a strong lateral branch
- Next remove weak or narrow angled branches and eliminate undesirable trunks in multi-trunk plants
- Finally, make any needed cuts, keeping in mind the plant's natural growth habit
- Look at your work; if a lot of additional pruning is necessary, you may want to do so in several stages over several months to a year to prevent excessive re-growth and allow the plant time to recover
- Major pruning jobs such as significant size reduction may require two or more years to complete

## 3. Prune at the appropriate time of year

- In general it is best to prune in late winter, when most plants are dormant (see the back side for a pruning calendar)
- Avoid pruning immediately after new growth develops in spring; allow the plant time to regain the energy it spent in expansion

- If growing a plant for its flowers, time your pruning to minimize disruption to blooming; prune spring flowering shrubs soon after they bloom and summer flowering shrubs by late winter
- Many perennials require regular pruning to maintain desired shape. Refer to the maintenance tips in the Grow Green Plant Guide for specifics
- Pruning in late summer to early fall may encourage new growth which is susceptible to winter damage

## 4. Maintain pruning equipment

- Store equipment in a dry room and apply oil after each use to inhibit rust
- Maintain sharp cutting edges; cuts made with sharp, properly adjusted tools heal faster
- When pruning diseased plants, disinfect all blades after each cut with alcohol, spray disinfectant, or a mixture of one part bleach to nine parts water to avoid spreading disease; rinse and oil tools after bleach treatment to inhibit rust

## 5. Make cuts correctly

- Prune evergreen hedges with a wide base and narrow top to allow light to reach the lower branches and maintain dense foliage in lower sections
- When cutting back to an intersecting branch, choose one that forms an angle of no more than 45 degrees with the one being removed
- To encourage rapid healing of wounds, make all cuts clean and smooth

- The bud or branch nearest to the cut usually produces rapid new growth; for more side branching, remove the tips of shoots
- Make cuts 1/2 inch above the bud or branch you want to flourish
- Select buds that point to the outside of the plant to avoid crisscrossing of branches through the plant's interior

## 6. Pruning large trees

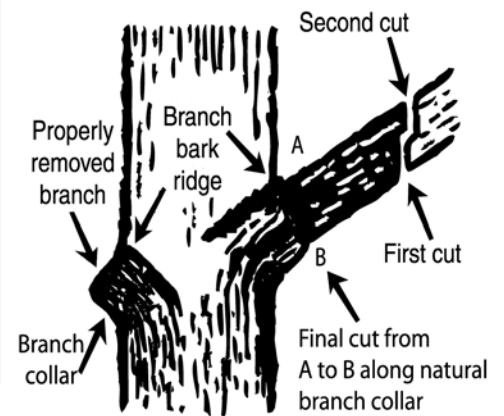
- Cut branches without removing

the branch collar (raised bark ridge) at the base of the branch. Avoid leaving stubs or making flush cuts

- When cutting branches more than 1 1/2 inches in diameter, use a three-part cut:
  1. First saw an undercut 6 to 12 inches from the trunk and about one third of the way through the branch
  2. Make the second cut from the top of the branch, about 3

inches out beyond the undercut, until the branch falls away

3. The final cut (from A to B) can be easily cut back to the collar of the branch



## 7. Less is more

- Prune oak trees susceptible to oak wilt during the heat of summer or the cold of winter when beetles transmitting the disease are less likely to be active
- Immediately after pruning apply pruning or latex paint to wounds on oaks susceptible to oak wilt
- Avoid excessive pruning which only results in vigorous unnatural regrowth and poorly oriented branches
- Thin, don't top; thinning creates a more natural looking, stronger tree
- With young trees, leave branches on the main trunk to create a thicker trunk more quickly; remove these branches when they reach one inch in diameter

# Pruning Guide\*

**Jan/Feb**  
when dormant

### Shade Trees

Ash  
Elm  
Maple  
Oak  
Pecan  
Pistache  
Sycamore

### Summer Flowering Trees

Crape Myrtle  
Desert Willow  
Vitex

### Summer Flowering Shrubs

Abelia  
Butterfly Bush  
Kidneywood  
Mexican Oregano  
Pavonia  
Possumhaw Holly  
Roses (repeat bloomers)  
Texas Sage

**April / May / June**  
after spring flowering

### Spring Flowering Trees

(light trimming if needed)

Anacacho Orchid Tree  
Roughleaf Dogwood  
Fringe Tree  
Saucer Magnolia  
Mexican Buckeye  
Mountain Laurel  
Redbud

### Spring Flowering Shrubs

Flowering Quince  
Mock Orange  
Viburnum  
Wisteria  
Roses (one-time bloomers)

### Broadleaf and Needleleaf Evergreens

Shear or trim anytime to maintain form and size.

Cherry Laurel	Euonymus	Evergreen Sumac
Holly	Juniper	Ligustrum
Photinia	Pittisporum	Southern Wax Myrtle
Yaupon	Yew	

\*Plants included because commonly found in landscapes; not necessarily recommended.



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