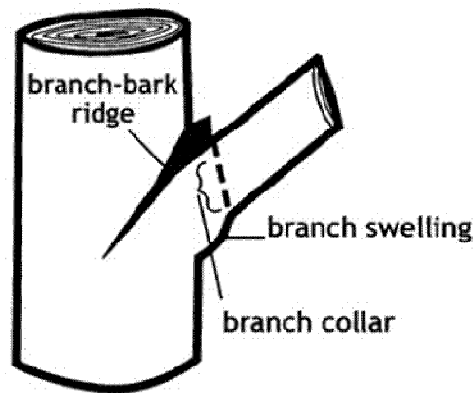


## Pruning Trees



To prune properly, pruning cuts should be made just outside the branch collar. The branch collar is the swollen part where the branch connects to a larger branch or the trunk of a tree.

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**W**hile it may seem that there is not much to be done in the yard this time of year, it is an excellent time to prune trees. Trees are generally better at dealing with pruning injuries this time of year and on deciduous trees it is easier to see the form of the tree without the leaves.

You may have pruned trees in the past, but as I drive around town I notice that non-professional pruning is often done with many errors that make it harder for a tree to recover. Also, even if you don't plan to prune the trees yourself it is good to know the basics to make sure the professional you hire is up to date on how to correctly prune a tree.

The first thing we should consider is do we need to prune. Reasons to prune include to remove dead branches, remove crowded or rubbing limbs, or to eliminate hazards. Trees also are pruned to increase light penetration to the ground so that lower level plants like grass will receive more sun and grow better. For grass this is only a temporary fix and it is recommended that shady areas be used as beds instead of grass lawn.

When pruning off branches it is good to remember that the foliage of a tree is there to capture energy from the sun. This energy is then used to make food for the tree. If you cut off branches, the tree has less leaves to manufacture food for itself. Cut enough foliage off a tree and over time it will starve to death. This is why you should never prune more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a tree's live branches at any one time.

If we find we have reasons to prune then it is best if we remember that pruning is an injury to a tree and that trees don't react to injuries the same way people do. While this may sound obvious, much of the logic used to prune trees in the past was done with that very assumption.

With this in mind the big concept is that trees don't heal. Instead, injured trees compartmentalize or wall off the injured area and then grow around it. This walling off only occurs at three areas; scientifically these are the growth rings, cells called rays and finally, the one most important to pruning, the branch collar. The injured area won't grow back, but instead if pruning is done correctly the tree will grow around the injured area. Thus a pruning cut's location is critical to a tree's response in growth and wound closure. To prune properly, pruning cuts should be made just outside the branch collar. The branch collar is the swollen part where the branch connects to a larger branch or the trunk of a tree. Leaving the branch collar allows the tree to wall off the injury. If you cut the branch collar off, then you get a rotten hole into the trunk that can weaken the tree. Finally, remember if the branch is larger than eight inches in diameter, the tree may have a hard time walling off that injury even if done properly. This is one reason why it is best to prune trees when they are young.

When removing a large limb, first reduce its weight to avoid tearing the bark by making an undercut about 12-18 inches from the limb's point of attachment. Then make a second cut from the top, just outside the branch collar. After you make the final cut there is no benefit to putting anything on the cut like pruning paints.

If you have a place for it, pruned branches piled up can make excellent homes for some of our smaller urban wildlife.

If done properly, pruning can do much to keep our trees and landscapes healthy.

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