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Pruning Shade Trees … with Special Notes on Dutch Elm Disease and Elm Tree Pruning

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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
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Pruning Shade Trees

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Shade trees may need pruning to promote their health, improve their appearance, or remove branches that may injure people or property. Examples of such pruning are removal of dead, dying, diseased or broken branches. In some cases you may want to remove low growing or overhanging branches for convenience and safety.

WHEN TO PRUNE

Pruning wounds heal faster if the cuts are made in the early part of the growing season. For this reason it is desirable that most pruning be done in the spring. Practical considerations, however, necessitate pruning at almost any or all seasons of the year. It is well, for example, to avoid pruning maples, birches, and other "bleeders" during the early spring when buds are breaking, even though actual damage caused by "bleeding" at this time is negligible. If you have to prune later in the season, make the cuts before freeze-up.

EQUIPMENT FOR PRUNING

A handsaw with 6 teeth to the inch is adequate for normal pruning cuts. For large cuts use a one-man crosscut saw.

Saws and other equipment especially for pruning are available and a good investment if you do a considerable amount of pruning.

HOW TO PRUNE

Make clean cuts flush with the remaining branch or main trunk. Do not leave stubs. The illustration gives pruning details. Note that large branches should be undercut first to avoid ripping the bark. Saw about one-third of the way through the underside of the branch about a foot from where the final cut will be made. Saw through the top of the branch about 2 inches beyond the undercut. When the branch breaks off remove the stub with a third cut.

If considerable pruning is necessary, start at the top of the tree. This will allow removal of cut branches that have lodged in the tree, as the work progresses downward.

In most cases, perform the pruning operation so the tree retains its natural shape.

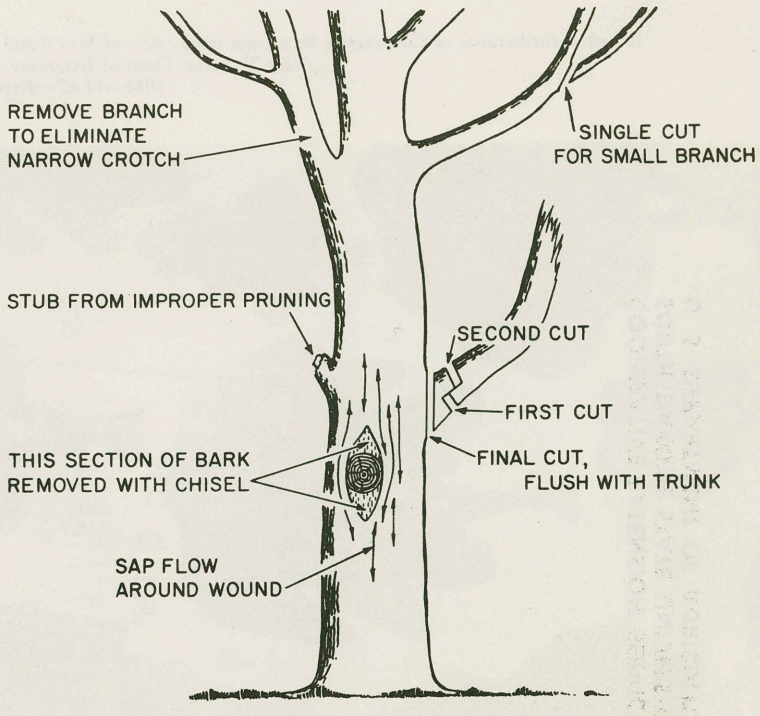
SHAPING THE CUTS

Pruning cuts heal faster if the bark above and below the cuts is removed. Removing bark to form an almond-shaped section parallel to the branch or trunk lets the sap flow around the wound. This promotes faster healing. Use a wood chisel and a hammer or a sharp knife to remove the bark.

WOUND DRESSING

Apply a wound dressing to pruning cuts to protect the tree. This helps to prevent drying, decay, and entrance of insects.

Two common materials often used for wound dressings are asphalt paint, sometimes called black asphaltum, and orange shellac. You can get these at most paint stores. There are also several special tree paints on the market. These include liquid plastic and



asphalt base paints. These materials may be applied with a paint brush. Some are also available in aerosol form.

Keep wounds covered with a dressing until healing is completed. This may require renewal of the dressing from time to time.

SAFETY

Any work above the ground is hazardous and pruning is no exception.

1. Keep tools in good condition.
2. Handle tools with care while working in the tree.
3. Avoid working in trees when they are wet and slippery.
4. Watch out for electric lines passing through the trees.
5. When using a ladder, have someone steady it.
6. If you have to climb in the tree, be careful not to put your weight on weak banches.
7. Look out for "widow-makers" (loose branches hanging in the tree).

ELM TREE PRUNING AND DUTCH ELM DISEASE

Controlling Dutch elm disease can be done partly by controlling elm bark beetle populations. The principle step in controlling the beetle is to remove and destroy its breeding places: dead or dying elm wood.

The first object in pruning elms is to remove all dead, dying, and broken branches, and any weak, shaded branches. But, do not prune tops of trees severely. Top pruning stimulates top growth, all the food the tree receives goes to the top, trunk and lower branch growth is decreased, and roots are starved. Such weakened trees are highly susceptible to bark beetle damage. Thin wood pruning may be practiced in the tops of trees, however, to permit light to reach inner branches and the lawn below.

It is essential that all pruned elm wood either be burned or buried in the ground at least a foot deep. In areas where Dutch elm disease is known to exist, it is especially important that pruned wood and removed trees be destroyed immediately. Immediate wood destruction not only eliminates beetle bark breeding places, but also may destroy the carrier of the disease.

For further information on Dutch elm disease, refer to FS 326, "Dutch Elm Disease."

ASK FOR THESE EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS:

FS 326—Dutch Elm Disease
FS 183—Thinning Black Hills Pine
FS 265—Pruning Black Hills Pine
EC 492—Shelterbelts for South Dakota
EC 566—Trees for South Dakota
EL 176—Grazing Ruins Shelterbelts

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