

# Quick Pruning Basics for Small Trees and Shrubs

(Adapted from U of MN Extension publication FO-00628, Rev. 1997, et.al.)

Pruning is a practice that alters the form and growth of a plant. Based on aesthetics and science, pruning can also be considered preventive maintenance. Many problems may be prevented by pruning correctly during formative years for a tree or shrub.

## Prune to promote plant health.

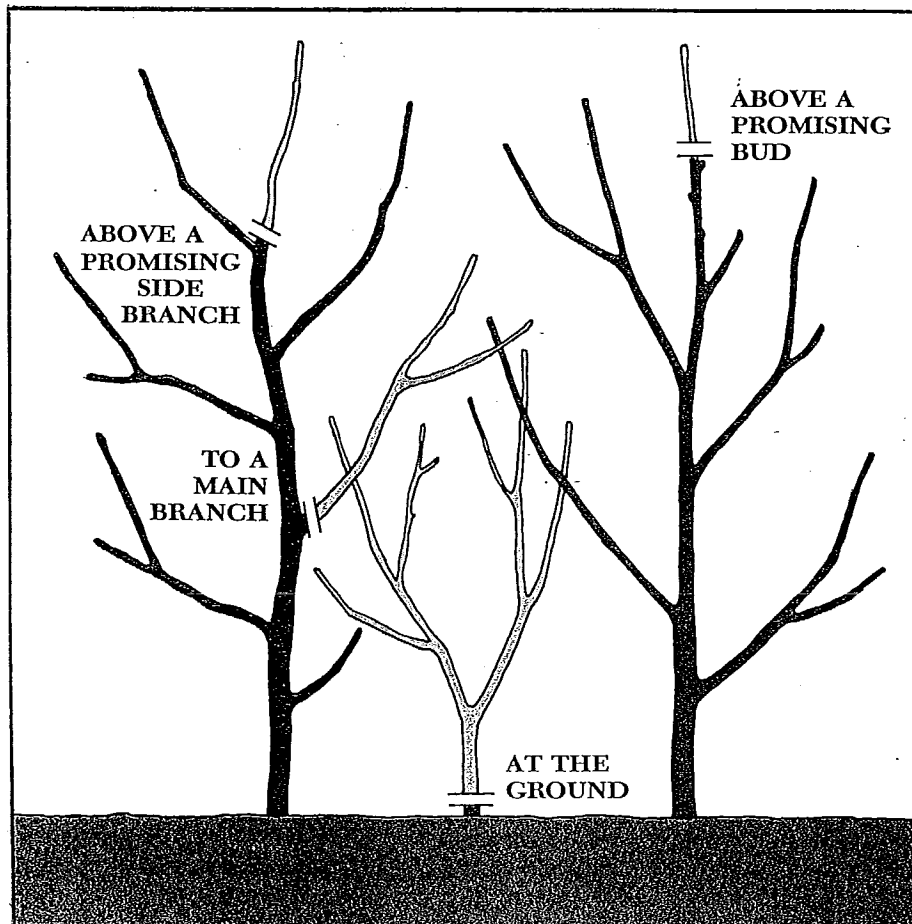
- Remove branches injured by disease, severe insect infestation, or animal browse.
- Remove dead or damaged wood to allow wound closure
- Remove branches that rub together
- Remove branch stubs
- *Make the proper cut (very important; see next two pages)*

## **Timing:** The dormant season is best for most pruning, November through March.

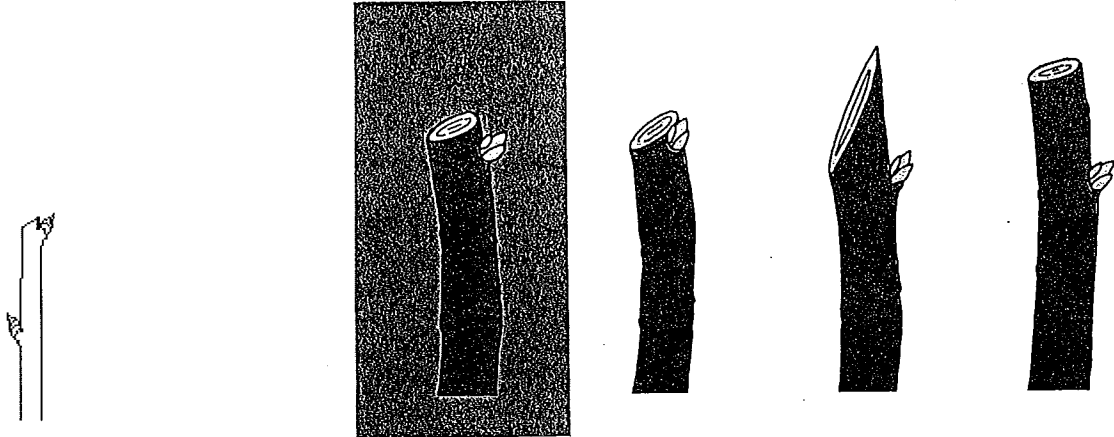
When the plant is without leaves, it is very easy to see branching structure, buds and where to make the proper cut. Dormant pruning can avoid the spread of diseases like oak wilt, fire blight, and canker diseases (such as Nectria canker on honeylocust and black knot disease on cherries and plums).

## **Proper branch pruning:**

To shorten a branch or twig is called **reduction pruning**. Cut the branch or twig back to a lateral (side) branch or bud. See the following pages for how to make the proper cut.



**Proper twig pruning:** to shorten a twig, cut it back to a lateral bud; make the cut the same angle as the bud; cut about 1/8 inch (fine twigs) to 1/4 inch (stout twigs) above the bud.



Proper cut.

Proper cut

Cuts too close and too far from the bud

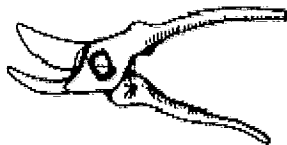
**Fig. 1. Pruning small branches and twigs**

### Use the right tools for pruning

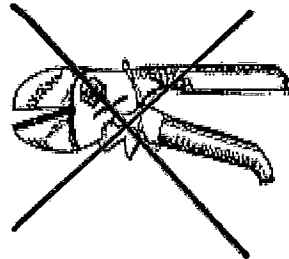
The right tools make pruning easier and help you do a good job. Keeping tools well-maintained and sharp will improve their performance.

A good pair of **by-pass pruning shears** is essential for doing high-quality pruning. You get what you pay for when buying pruners; don't skimp. Felco and Corona are excellent brands.

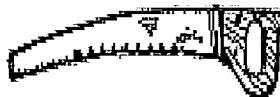
**By-pass type pruning shears**



**Anvil type pruner, NOT recommended for live wood.**



**Hand saws** are very important for cutting branches over 1 inch in diameter. Many types of hand saws are available. Look for a **tri-cut or razor tooth pruning saws**.



**Lopping shears** are similar to pruning shears, but their long handles provide greater leverage needed to cut branches up to 1 1/2 inches in diameter. Use the **by-pass type** on live wood.

