



Landscape Services

Safety Standard Operating Procedure

(Revised 7/2023)

Tree Pruning

This SSOP provides guidance on the safe practice of **Tree Pruning**. Large and/or small equipment may be used while pruning trees. As with any equipment or tool, the most basic premise for safe operation is reading and adhering to the manufacturer's instructions and warnings. This SSOP is not a substitute for the owner's manual(s) produced by the manufacturer.

Safety Requirements PPE Required: PPE requirements are highly tailored to specific work conditions. Before pruning begins, consider what PPE is needed and what, if any, work area barricades should be put in place.

When working with small hand tools: Work gloves are optional. Example, hand pruners or loppers. Work gloves are recommended when working with handsaws.

When working with tools above the head: A hardhat and safety glasses. Example: manual or motorized polesaw, pole pruners.

When working with a chainsaw: Work boots, chaps, work gloves, safety glasses, earplugs, hard hat (if working with polesaw).

When pruning from the lift: Safety harness and all aforementioned applicable PPE equipment. This method also requires safety measures be taken on the ground. Work area should be marked off with caution tape, cones, or other barricades. Ground workers should wear high-vis vests and hardhats.

Safety Hazards: Vehicle and pedestrian traffic, underground and overhead utilities, lifting, bending, slipping, tripping, falling, overhead objects, dust, noise, sharp objects, blind spots, equipment malfunction, pinch points, hot or cold temperatures, and inclement weather.

Scheduled: Depending on the pruning objective, pruning can occur year-round. But pruning decisions must be well-informed. Contact the University Arborist or FMLS Assistant Manager for guidance. Deadwood pruning, broken branch pruning, pruning for pathogen removal, or for correcting safety hazards can be completed any time of year. Directional pruning is best completed in the spring or fall. Try to refrain from pruning in the hot summer months or when a tree is otherwise stressed. Also related to scheduling, be cognizant of pest/pathogen life cycles to avoid increasing risk of spread. Example: Don't prune native elm trees when Dutch Elm Disease carrying beetles are known to be active.

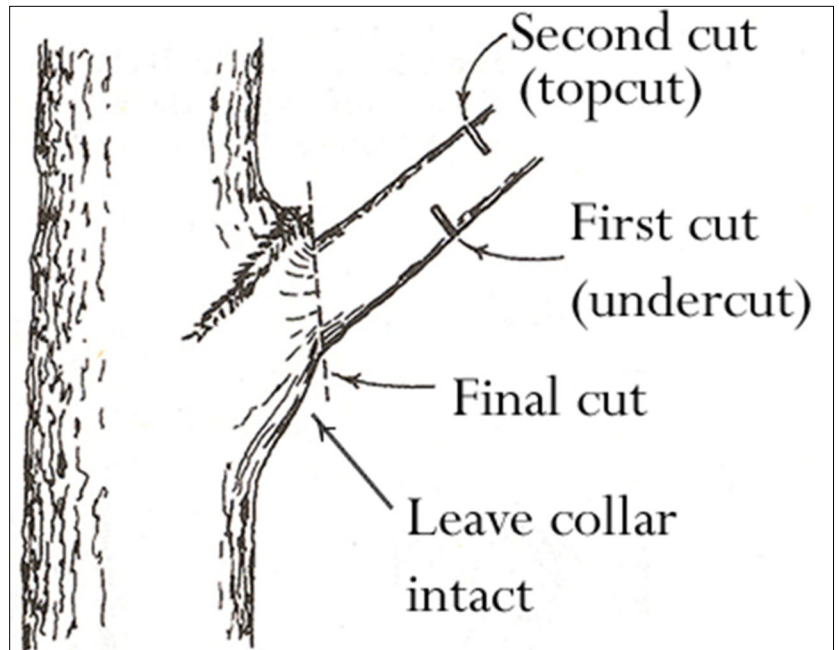
Horticultural Elements: As mentioned above, try to avoid pruning in the hot summer or when the tree is otherwise stressed.

IPM: As mentioned above, be cognizant of potential pathogen issues. Also, if pruning pathogen effected material out of a tree you must sterilize your blades at the end of the process or even between cuts. For guidance contact the University Arborist, FMLS Assistant Manager, Oklahoma Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Lab, OSU Extension, horticulturalist, or other specialist.

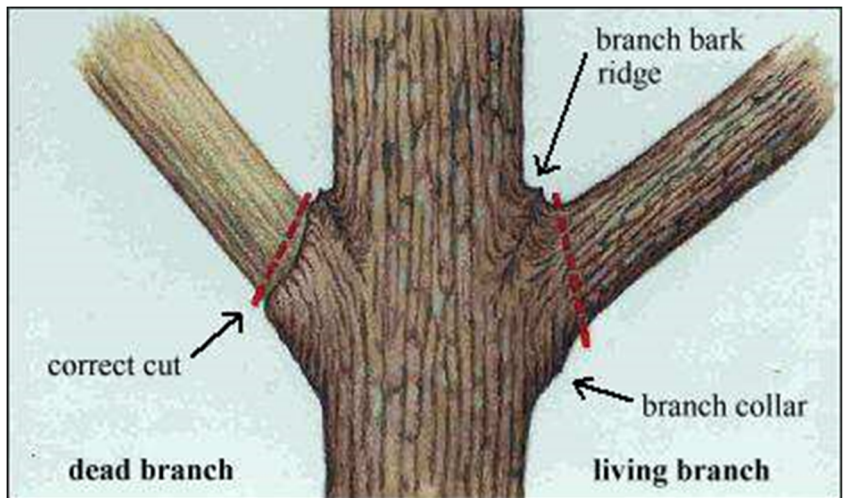
Pruning is a very complex and detailed topic. This is a basic overview, not a complete instructional. Please consult the University Arborist before any tree pruning is conducted.

Pruning Basics:

- No more than 25% should be removed in one year
- Do not remove a branch that is half the size of the diameter of the trunk
- Large pruning cuts have more negative impact on a tree than smaller cuts (<3-4")
- Several pruning cuts over 2 – 3 years are better than one severe pruning
- Pruning is stressful for a tree as it removes stored food reserves (wood) and food producing capacity (leaves)
- Young trees can tolerate pruning better than older, mature trees
- Try to avoid removing lower branches on young trees
- Proper pruning cuts will not stimulate excessive growth and branch formation, water sprouts
- No topping or heading cuts
- Prune for structural strength not appearance
- Do not raise evergreens (full to the ground) i.e.: Junipers, Magnolias
- Use a three cut method to prevent bark peel (Image 1)
- Don't cut into the branch collar and cut outside the branch bark ridge (Image 2)
- Prune back to a branch or bud
- No flush cuts, no stubs



1) Three Cut Method



2) Branch Bark Ridge and Branch Collar

- Cut at a 45° angle, small branches (Image 3)
- Use tools that are adequate for the size of the cuts
 - Hand pruners < 1"
 - Loppers ½"-1"
 - Hand saw- <3"

