

Pruning Don'ts

Improper pruning can cause damage that will last for the life of the tree, or worse, shorten the tree's life. Below are some pruning tips to ensure the continuing health of your trees.

- ★ Don't remove more than one-third of the tree's canopy in any growing season. This can weaken the tree by eliminating foliage needed for photosynthesis and sugar production.
- ★ Don't routinely thin the tree's inner canopy. It does not improve the tree's health, but can actually make the tree more susceptible to stress from high summer temperatures. Over-thinning reduces the tree's sugar production capacity and can create tip-heavy limbs that are prone to failure.
- ★ Don't heavily prune trees right after they leaf out. Developing new leaves uses a great deal of the tree's stored energy and removing foliage before it has a chance to photosynthesis and replace the carbohydrates used will weaken the tree, particularly if it is done several years in a row.
- ★ Don't make flush cuts, which cause substantially more injury to the tree than wounds left by proper pruning. They prevent the tree from sealing off the wounded area and protecting itself against the entry of wood-rot fungus into the heartwood.
- ★ Don't "top" trees. Topping results when branches are cut flat, leaving a long stub beyond the next viable branch. The flat cut can allow water to remain on the wood and promote wood rot. The stub dies and also promotes wood rot. Trees respond to this type of pruning by producing a quick flush of fast-growing, weakly attached branches called watersprouts. Because of their weak attachment, watersprouts are prone to breakage as they grow larger. Topping can cause a decline in the tree's health and ruin the beauty of your tree.
- ★ Do not apply wound dressings to the cut surface. Wound dressing release chemicals that can be harmful to the tree and can hold moisture against the cut surface that promotes wood rot. Instead allow the area to dry naturally. The tree will seal off the wounded tissue and begin growing callus tissue to cover it.
- ★ Don't be overly concerned if some trees "bleed" or leak sap in spring after late winter pruning. Maples, willow and birches are prone to bleeding and should ideally be pruned in late summer. However, bleeding is not harmful to the tree, the sap that is lost was intended for the branches that are now gone, so the tree is not weakened. However, sap can attract insects and provide a place for fungal spores to grow; so frequently wash the sap off the tree until it stops bleeding.
- ★ Don't take on the pruning of a large tree if it is beyond your skill. Pruning large trees is dangerous work. If pruning involves working above the ground, or using power equipment, it's best to hire a professional arborist who can determine what type of pruning is necessary to improve the health, appearance and safety of trees. Find a Nebraska Certified Arborist in your area by visiting the Nebraska Arborist Association, <http://www.nearborists.org/>.