

Pruning Dos and Don'ts

Dos

- Do know what plant you have. What is its growth habit; what is its life expectancy; what will be its dimensions when mature?
- Do know something about tree and woody plant anatomy. Know how trees grow and that how and where you make cuts can stimulate or retard growth.
- Do use the right tools. Learn the correct use for a pruning saw, a pole pruner, lopping shears and bypass pruners.
- Do wear safety glasses and a hard hat, if necessary.
- Do a visual examination first to determine what you plan to cut.
- Do use the three-cut method for large branches. The first cut should be about 12 inches from where you will make your final cut. Make it an undercut, cutting about halfway into the branch. The second cut should be outside the first cut, all the way through the branch, leaving a short stub. The stub is then cut just outside the branch bark ridge/branch collar. The reason for this process is you are getting rid of the weight first and then you come back and make your final cut. This will avoid tearing the bark from the tree.
- Do hire an expert for a big job, corrective pruning and restoration pruning after storm damage. Always ask about credentials.
- Do use thinning cuts to correct overgrowth from excessive/incorrect pruning (crape murder).
- Do use heading cuts to encourage branching for roses and herbs.

Don'ts

- Don't make flush cuts and stub cuts. These are two of the biggest pruning violations. A flush cut is when you cut too close to the trunk. A stub cut is when you leave a stub that can decay and will have to be cut back later.
- Don't take out too many inner branches. In addition to interfering with tree growth and shape, it also removes some protective structures. For example, during the hottest part of the summer, the outer canopy of the tree will shut down so the tree doesn't lose too much water. The inside leaves are cooler in the shade and are therefore able to still complete the photosynthesis process required for energy.
- Don't remove more than one third of the live growth at any single time. For mature trees, never remove more than one quarter of live growth.
- Don't top cut a tree or remove the entire outer canopy. This will result in the tree producing rapid growth that will be weak such as "water sprouts."