



Winter is the best time for pruning trees

By Donna Cuin

The perfect time to give trees and woody ornamentals a haircut is when they don't have leaves on – during their dormancy.

Without leaves, the structure of the branches is more visible. The trees have less sap running in vascular tissue so the pruning wounds are less likely to lose precious moisture.

One more reason to prune this time of year is the inactivity of most pests.

Pruning should create a tree with good structure and strong branch attachments, which limits liabilities related to branches breaking and falling on property or people later in the tree's life.

One of the most important aspects of good tree structure is a single central leader or main trunk for the tree. Having multiple leaders in a tree creates a weak attachment point where a split occurs, and this is a place where future stresses can cause breaks or

splits in the trunk. If a secondary leader or co-dominant leader can be removed when small, the injury will produce callous tissue that will eventually cover the injury and enclose it inside new woody growth.

This one pruning technique could have been used many times to prevent split and damaged trees during so many windstorms or heavy snowstorms over the years. The technique can be used not only on boulevard trees in our towns but also in trees planted around farms and ranches.

Remove Dead, Damaged Branches

The next focus for pruning is removal of any dead, damaged, or diseased branches in the canopy. If disease has not yet started in a dead or damaged branch, it has the perfect opportunity and environment to spread if such a branch is not removed. Pruning is intended to prevent a branch from later breaking and possibly causing property damage or injury.

Opening the tree canopy through pruning allows more light and better air circulation throughout the branches and leaves. This allows for more photosynthesis to occur and prevents the environment for diseases to infect leaves.

Within the canopy, the main branches, called scaffold branches, should be evenly spaced around the trunk and vertically up the central trunk of the tree. That way, the weight of the branches is spread around the circle of the trunk as well as from bottom to the top. If

branches touch or rub when they sway in the wind, the weaker of the two branches should be removed to prevent future damage and disease.

Any branches that grow downward should be removed, especially in the lower branches. Removing these downward growing branches gives room for someone to work under the tree without running into branches. After these branches are removed, there may be more detailed pruning to open the tree canopy for further air circulation; however, do not remove too many branches in one year because each branch supports a certain portion of the leaves the tree needs to survive. The general rule of thumb is to remove only 25 percent of the leaves or less. Leaves that remain will be able to photosynthesize enough to support new growth of the tree.

More Information Available

For detailed information about making proper pruning cuts or how to select which branches to remove within a tree canopy, please contact your local University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service office for handouts or more detailed directions (county contact information is at <http://ces.uwyo.edu/Counties.asp>).

Other helpful tree information, including "Correct pruning can revitalize landscapes," is available by going to barnyardsandbackyards.com, click on Resources, then Landscaping and look under Trees and Shrubs.



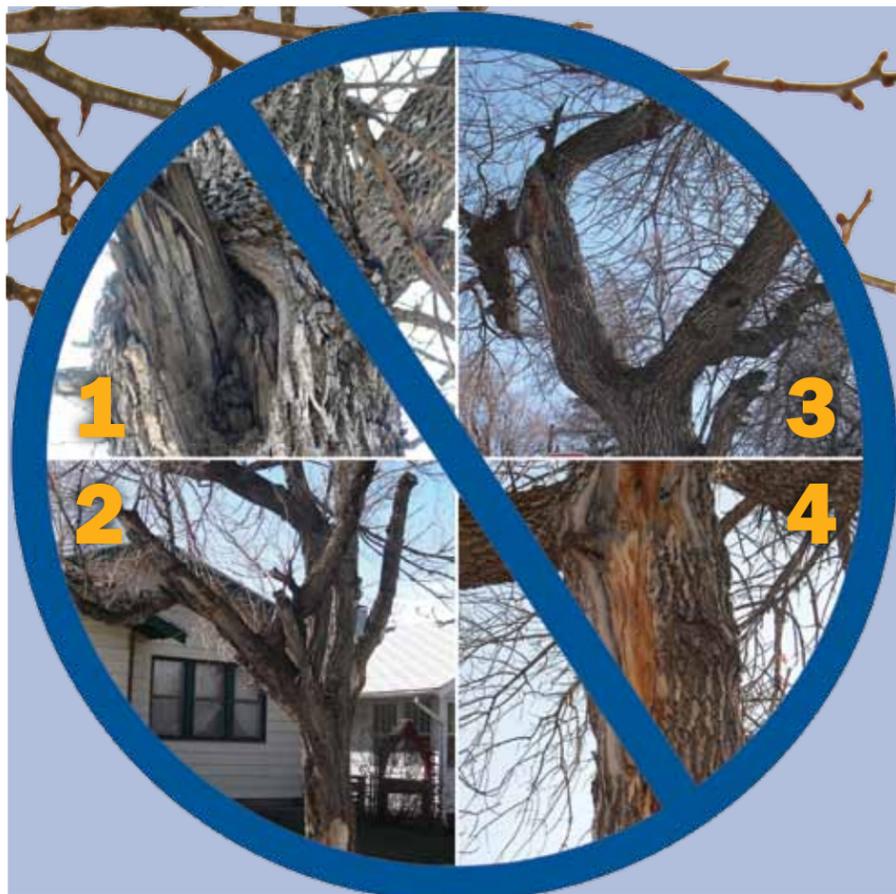
For small branches less than 1/2-inch thick, a good pair of by-pass hand pruners will work.



For larger branches up to 2 inches thick, loppers will do the trick.



Pole pruners top right and top left, along with hand pruners (left center), loppers (center), and pruning saw (right center). Pole pruners and pole saws are handy for taller trees. Some will have telescoping poles, making it easier to reach up into the plant canopy.



Poor pruning problems

Failure to correctly prune trees can lead to decay and, with time, potential property liability problems from falling branches and limbs.

1. The jagged, dead wood will harbor bacteria and fungus that can lead to internal decay of the trunk. Callous tissue will probably never cover the wound.
2. This tree has multiple pruning issues. The top cuts encouraged new growth with weak attachments at the right and center of photo. Broken branches caused by either snow or wind loads have left wounds making the tree susceptible to decay. A vehicle struck the base of the trunk causing the bark to fall away and opening the supporting structure to decay.
3. A large wound remains from a branch that broke in the upper left. The missing branch removed a large portion of tree and leaves that provided food for growth.
4. The same tree in photo 3, bark has still not covered this wound caused by a branch breaking at a weak point and ripping bark from the trunk. Bacterial or fungal infections can infiltrate and further weaken the tree.