



# J&L Garden Center

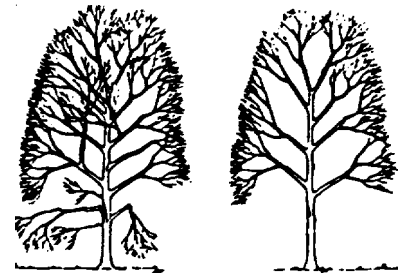
The All Season Gift  
and Garden Center

620 North 500 West Bountiful, Utah 292-0421

[www.JLGardenCenter.com](http://www.JLGardenCenter.com)

## Pruning Guide

**Pruning is an art, not a science.** Even though there are principles and steps to prune correctly, there is not one best way to prune a tree or shrub. Unfortunately, trial and error is usually the best teacher. Pruning is one of the most important tasks a gardener can do. Many gardeners are reluctant to prune because they aren't sure how to prune and they are afraid of injuring their plants. However, no pruning can be just as bad for plants as incorrect pruning. Take time to learn the correct principles of pruning and then practise. A good way to learn how to prune is to take a pruning class. We, at J&L, offer a beginning pruning class each spring during the month of March. Please give us a call for the exact times for this class. The USU extension service also teaches several advanced pruning classes each year. Buy a book about pruning to have a reference to fall back on. Ortho, Sunset, and Better Homes and Gardens all have good beginning books about pruning. Many other, very technical books, are also available about pruning.



### Reasons For Pruning

- Thin fruit crops
- Strengthen plants
- Rejuvenate old plants
- Stimulate new growth
- Control size (height and width)
- Shape trees (important for new trees)
- Remove unsightly branches (dead or broken).
- Remove potential insect and disease problems.

### Do's and Don'ts of Pruning

1. Cut branches on a 45 degree angle with the top towards the bud or branch you want to become the leader. Pruning on an angle allows water to drain off the surface. Do not cut on too steep of an angle. Stay 1/8" away from the bud.



2. Cut close to a bud, cross branch, or crotch. **Don't ever leave a stub.**



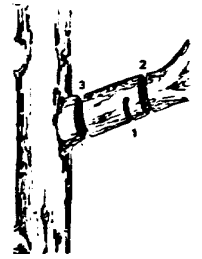
3. Don't cut too close to the bud or trunk, you may damage the tissue. Stay 1/16" from the top of the branch and 1/8" from the bottom.

4. Hold pruners right-side up while cutting close to the trunk, to avoid leaving a stub.

5. Make clean cuts. Don't leave ragged edges on a branch, or strip bark from the plant. Use a knife to make a smooth edge. Ragged cuts take longer to heal than clean cuts.



6. Use the three cut method to remove large limbs. Make the first cut three to six inches from the trunk. Saw up through the branch 1/3 of the way or until the weight of the branch begins to bind the saw blade. Make the second cut one or two inches further away from the trunk than the first cut. Saw from the top until the branch falls off the tree. Make the third cut next to the tree, following all the correct pruning procedures.



7. Pruning paint, or tree seal, does not necessarily help the tree heal. Trees and shrubs have natural ways of healing and sealing cuts. The only reason to apply a pruning paint is to make the tree look better. However, seal all cuts on a rose bush. Unsealed rose cuts are vulnerable to cane borers and to dehydrating.



8. **Do not ever "Top" a tree.** Prune and shape the tree regularly to prevent the need for drastic pruning. (See page 3 for alternatives to "Topping")

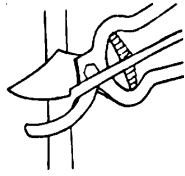
9. Prune to control the direction of new growth. Try to open up the tree rather than to create a dense canopy.



10. Sterilize pruning equipment before moving from one tree to another. If your tree has a disease make sure to sterilize your equipment between every cut, so you don't spread the disease within the tree. Several diseases can be transmitted by pruning equipment.

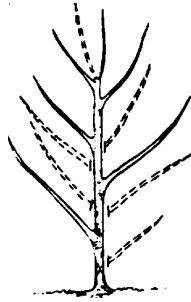
11. Fertilize trees regularly but reduce the amount of fertilizer you apply while you are trying to reduce the tree size or slow its growth.

12. Prune trees twice a year if needed. Dormant prune in the spring and then remove suckers and control the new growth during the summer. Summer pruning discourages new growth.



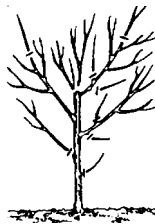
## Steps of Pruning

1. Remove all Dead, Broken, or Diseased branches.
2. Remove crossing or parallel branches (leave the best one).
3. Remove branches or twigs growing too close together.
4. Remove branches with weak crotches (smaller than 45 degrees or larger than 90 degrees). If a branch with a weak crotch must remain, brace or train the branch to form a strong crotch angle.
5. Remove all suckers (water sprouts) as soon as you see them: anytime of the year.
6. Remove a few of the main branches of the tree each year if you need to lower the height of the tree. Do not remove more than one-third of the total tree in one year. Take two or three years to reduce the tree size rather than doing it all in one year. Drop Crotch your tree, don't top your tree!
7. Thin and shape the tree as required to maintain an adequate appearance, according to the type and location of the tree.



## When to Prune

Dormant season pruning stimulates new vigorous growth. Pruning during the growing season stimulates less new growth. Some plants benefit from summer pruning if new growth is not wanted. Espaliered and bonsai trees are trees that should be pruned during the summer. Other trees (especially apple trees) benefit from being trimmed twice a year. Dormant pruning to control the shape and summer pruning to remove the suckers.



Prune most shrubs, fruit trees, and shade trees in the early spring while they are still dormant (before March). Some trees will bleed sap if they are pruned heavily in the spring. This sap loss is usually not harmful, but it may invite insect or disease problems. Prune trees that bleed either in the late fall or in the early summer. Maple trees, birch trees, beech trees, dogwood trees, willow trees, and some flowering trees will bleed if pruned early in the spring.



Prune early-spring blooming plants; Lilac, Quince, Forsythia, Rhododendron, Wisteria, Flowering Pear, Flowering Cherry, Flowering Plum, etc., after they finish blooming;

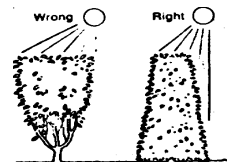


to get the total benefit from their blossoms. Don't forget to prune them right after they bloom. If you wait too long to prune them you will be removing next year's blossoms. Prune tender plants, such as roses, when the new growth starts to appear in late-spring (April).

Prune Pine trees and Spruce trees only if needed. Don't prune them the same as a fruit tree or a shade tree or your tree will begin to take on an unusual shape. Remove a branch at the tree trunk or at another cross branch while the tree is dormant. If you only want to shape the tree, prune the candles (the new growth) after they are fully extended but before the new needles are fully developed (usually mid-May). Try not to remove more than one-half of the new growth. Do not trim the tips of the branches, in this manner, the rest of the year or you may permanently misshape the tree.



Prune hedges differently than you prune trees. You want to make a hedge as dense and as bushy as possible. Trim all the branch tips to make them produce as many side branches as possible. Trim your hedge heavily in the spring; after the new growth is fully developed. Trim your hedge lightly during the summer to maintain its appearance. Trim your hedge two or three times each year, not just once, to keep it looking its best.



Prune grape vines late winter. They will bleed if pruned in the spring. Ask for a free Grape Pruning Guide.

## Definitions:

**Thinning Cuts** Completely removes entire stems, limbs or branches. Thinning allows sunlight to reach the center of the plant. Thinning also redirects energy to the remaining branches, instead of stimulating new grow or suckers.

**Heading Cuts** Pruning branches in the middle, next to side branches or buds, that will direct the new growth the way you want it. Promotes thicker branching and produces a fuller growth. Has a tendency to stimulate suckering unless a dominant leader is left.

**Shearing** Indiscriminate pruning of all branches and stems, not taking into consideration any side branches or buds. Shearing should only be used for hedges where dense, thick foliage is desired.

## Ten Pruning Myths

1. All pruning should only be done during the dormant season.
2. A tree can bleed to death if you prune it at the wrong time of the year.
3. A large shade tree and an overhead utility line can usually coexist peacefully without much trimming.
4. All large cuts should be treated with a pruning seal.
5. Pruning, by itself, will keep a tree or shrub in bounds.
6. Pruning slows growth.
7. A good pruning job should be obvious.
8. Pine trees can be cut back hard, just like deciduous plants and trees.
9. Large limbs should be cut so that they are flush with the trunk.
10. Plant diseases cannot be spread through pruning tools.

# Pruning versus Topping



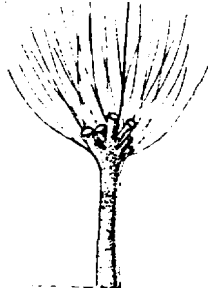
"Topping" is a type of pruning that removes most, or all of the small branches and limbs; leaving only large, stubby limbs. Topping is sometimes considered a fast and inexpensive method of reducing the overall height and shape of a tree. However, if all factors are taken into consideration, topping is not a long-term, fast way of reducing the size of the tree. Topping can also be a very expensive way to maintain the size of the tree.



Trees are often topped because they grow into utility wires, they interfere with a view, they make harvesting fruit a hard job, or they may simply grow so large they worry the homeowner. Many pruning alternatives are available so topping a tree should never be the solution.

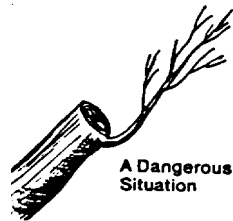
## Facts of Topping

1. Topping may starve the tree to death. Normal pruning guidelines recommend not removing more than one-third of the total tree in one year. If too many of the tree's leaves are removed the food making ability of the tree may be seriously damaged, causing the tree to die. Some tree varieties (sycamore, willow, poplar) are more resilient than others and can tolerate the extreme pruning of topping. Other varieties (beech, ginkgo, oak) will usually die if they are topped.



2. The large stubs left by topping are vulnerable to insect and disease problems. The tree's natural defense system will not be able to do its job when such large cuts are left exposed. These stubs are especially vulnerable to the spores of the decay fungus. A topped tree is an ugly tree. Even if the tree is pruned correctly, after being topped, it never regains its former grace and character.

3. Pruning does not stop or stunt growth. Pruning actually stimulates new growth. By pruning severely you stimulate more new growth, usually in the form of water sprouts or suckers. Suckers are the fast growing branches that are usually attached to the larger limbs in very weak positions. Weak branches and crotches make the tree unsafe during wind storms and with heavy snow loads. Unless the tree is regularly pruned, for the rest of its life, the tree will be larger and bushier than it was before it was topped.

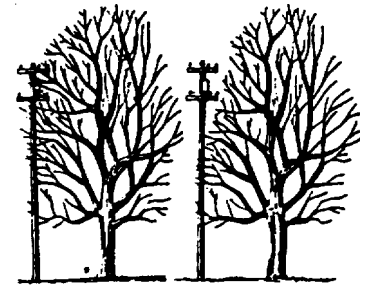


4. In the short term topping may seem to be an easier and a less expensive way to prune a tree than to hire a professional tree pruner. However, in the long term, proper pruning is actually cheaper. Topped trees usually need to be pruned more frequently (in the fu-

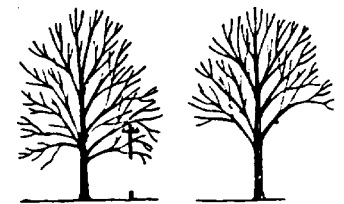
ture) than properly pruned trees. Topped trees are more insect and disease prone; increasing the cost of chemical treatments. Topped trees are more likely to cause damage to surrounding buildings and shrubs than properly pruned trees. Topped trees may actually decrease the property value of your home.

## Alternatives to Topping

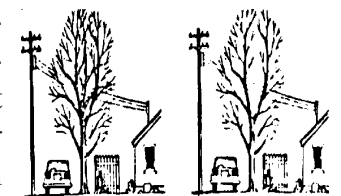
**Side Pruning** This pruning technique is useful when a tree is planted too close to a house or too close to power lines. Careful pruning can direct the tree away from one side to the other side, without creating a lopsided or unsightly tree. By thinning the tree rather than just heading back the branches you can avoid a hedge-like canopy.



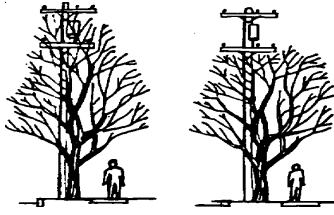
**Under Pruning** This pruning technique can be used for trees, planted too close to sidewalks, to allow pedestrians to walk under the tree. Additional crown thinning can help keep the tree looking natural. Be sure to maintain the tree's symmetry by removing the lower branches on all sides of the tree.



**Through Pruning** This pruning technique sometimes creates a "doughnut hole". This type of pruning allows large trees, that have been planted under telephone lines, to maintain some of their natural appearance. With proper selection, the tree can be opened without creating an unsightly tunnel appearance. This type of pruning is not recommended for use near high voltage lines.



**Drop Crotch Pruning** Through the use of drop-crotch pruning, tree size and shape can be reduced without weakening the tree or creating an eyesore. When done correctly, drop-crotch pruning is like a good haircut, virtually unnoticeable.



Drop-crotching is a pruning method that combines thinning out the crown of the tree and reducing its height and spread at the same time. Remove several inside branches right at the tree trunk. Do not just lop off large perimeter branches. Prune the large perimeter branches at their junction with the shorter, but still large diameter, side branches. Do not remove the large branches next to small branches or suckers may begin to take over. If a strong leader remains dominant, the tendency for the tree to produce suckers is greatly reduced.

Try not to remove more than twenty to thirty percent of the total tree in one year. Less is best, but in severe cases, prune your tree heavily for two or three years in a row, to reduce the overall height and spread, and then do not prune as much. With care, drop crotch pruning will produce a smaller, more desirable tree, while still maintaining its natural shape and appearance.

## Prevent the need to "Top a Tree"

1. Plant the right tree in the right location. Don't plant a big tree under a power line or in a small area. Plant a dwarf fruit tree instead of a standard fruit tree if you want a small tree. Find out how tall the tree you want will ultimately grow before you plant it.

2. Start pruning your tree correctly while it is young. The first five years is the most important time to prune your tree. Most trees pruned correctly during the first five years do not need much pruning the rest of their life.

3. Don't over water or over fertilize your tree. Too much water and too much fertilizer will make your tree grow faster and larger than normal. Remember to reduce the amount of fertilizer you apply while you are pruning to reduce the size of your tree. Do not fertilize your tree at all for five or six years after you severely prune it.

4. Prune regularly. A light pruning every three years will help to keep your tree healthy and help to prevent any unanticipated problems from arising.

## Topping Vs. Drop Crotch Pruning

There are times when the size and shape of a tree must be changed. With care and skill, this change can be accomplished without marring the tree's beauty or usefulness. Although the speed and nature of regrowth will depend on the species and various growth factors, the



comparison between topping the tree and using proper pruning techniques will be dramatic. Sometimes the best solution for trees planted in the wrong location is to completely remove them rather than trying to prune them.

### Topping



### Year 1

The topped tree is an ugly stub. The properly pruned tree is a little smaller after pruning and the appearance is still natural.



### Year 3

The topped tree has numerous suckers growing abnormally fast. The pruned tree is growing much slower than the topped tree. The growth is also better distributed throughout the tree.



### Year 6

The topped tree is as tall as it was in the beginning. The topped tree is far more bushy, ugly, and dangerous than before it was topped. The properly pruned tree is safer, more beautiful, and its size is better controlled.

### Pruning

