It’s pruning time again and it’s important to prune, especially fruit trees. Landscape trees should be left alone except to give them a good going over and remove any damaged or diseased branches, branches that are crossing over one another and branches that hang down too low.

* Prune sparingly. When in doubt, **DON’T** prune.

* A branch should be smaller than the trunk or limb which it arises.

* The diameter of lateral branches should be less than three-fourths that of the parent branch or trunk.

* Branches should be well spaced on the trunk.

* Tree trunks should be tapered to decrease stress on top of the tree.

* Wide crotch angles insure strength.

* In older unpruned trees, make a few larger pruning cuts. A few big cuts are better than many small ones.

* **DO NOT** prune flush to the trunk.

* **DO NOT** use any sort of pruning sealant.

* **DO NOT** top your trees, it can shorten their life.

Fruit trees benefit from more extensive pruning. When planting new fruit trees, cut the top of the trees about hip high (if you are short, maybe a little higher – if you are really tall, maybe a little
lower). For the first year or two, **DO NOT** prune any branches that grow low on the trunk, leaving them on promotes a stronger, thicker trunk.

### Maintaining Plant Health

In pruning to maintain plant health, first consider sanitation, which includes the elimination of dead, dying, or diseased wood. Any dying branch or stub can be the entry point or build-up chamber for insects or disease that could spread to other parts of the tree. When removing diseased wood such as a fungal canker or fireblight, it is important that the cut be made in healthy wood, beyond the point of infection, with a sterile blade.

### Pruning Deciduous Shrubs

The pruning recommended for most deciduous shrubs consists of thinning out, gradual renewal, and rejuvenation pruning. In thinning out, a branch or twig is cut off either at its point of origin from the parent stem, to a lateral side branch, to be “Y” of a branch junction, or at ground level. Thin out the oldest and tallest stems first, to allow for growth of vigorous side branches. This method of pruning results in a more open plant and does not stimulate excessive new top growth. Considerable growth can be cut without changing the plant’s natural appearance or habit of growth. Plants can be maintained at a given height and width for years by thinning out. This method of pruning is done best with pruning shears, loppers, or a saw (not hedge shears).

In gradual renewal pruning, a few of the oldest and tallest branches are removed at, or slightly above, ground level on an annual basis. Some thinning may be necessary to shorten long branches or maintain a symmetrical shape.

Too rejuvenate an old, overgrown shrub, 1/3 of the oldest, tallest branches can be removed at or slightly above ground level before new growth starts.

When the shrub is to be pruned is grown for flowers, the pruning must be timed to minimize disruption of the blooming. Spring flowering shrubs bloom on last season’s growth and should be pruned soon after they bloom. This allows for vigorous growth during the summer, to provide flower buds for the following year.
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