Pruning Guide

Proper pruning is beneficial to a tree’s development. This guide is intended to describe how young trees should be pruned. For mature or larger trees it is best to hire a certified arborist.

It is illegal to prune or remove a street tree without a permit. To apply for a permit, contact the City Arborist’s office at (408) 794-1901 or www.sanjoseca.org/tree.

### When To Prune
Prune after leaves have fallen or following the coldest part of winter, before buds open. Avoid pruning in summer and fall.

### Proper Structure
- **Radial Spacing:** No more than 3 branches attached at the same height
- **Branch Angles:** Parallel branches should be about 30° or more apart on opposite ends of the trunk

1. Find A Branch You Want To Prune
2. Place Pruners Right Outside Branch Collar
3. A Correct Cut Leaves Branch Bark Ridge & Branch Collar Intact

### The Proper Cut
Cut just outside the branch collar. If done correctly, the leftover tissue will form a proper scar to prevent future disease or damage to the trunk.

1. **PROPER PRUNER TECHNIQUE**
   1: Find A Branch You Want To Prune
   2: Place Pruners Right Outside Branch Collar
   3: A Correct Cut Leaves Branch Bark Ridge & Branch Collar Intact

2. **IMPROPER CUTS**
   - **Stub Cut:** Don’t Leave Too Much Tissue After the Cut
   - **Flush Cut:** Don’t Cut Into The Branch Collar

When a branch is too thick for pruners and requires a saw, use the Three Cut Method.

3. **THREE CUT METHOD**
   1: Partially Cut From Beneath
   2: Cut Several Inches Above And Allow Limb To Fall
   3: Cut Just Outside the Branch Collar

### Included Bark
When a branch is attached at a narrow angle to the trunk or another branch

**REMOVE INCLUDED BARK**
- **Trunk**
- **Included Bark**
- **Cut Along Dashed Line**

### ALWAYS PRUNE THE BRANCH BACK TO:
- A: Bud
- B: Connection With Another Branch
- C: Trunk
The Five-Step Process

Follow these steps to give your tree its best chance at a long, well structured life with fewer issues of broken branches, rot, and obstructions. Remember, never remove more than 25% of a tree's canopy!

1) The Four D's
- Remove dead, dying, damaged, or diseased branches
- If unsure if the branch or tree is alive: scratch off a tiny piece of bark; if the tissue is green the branch is alive.

2) Central Leader
- Select a central leader- ideally the strongest, tallest, most vertical stem in line with trunk (green)
- Remove or cut back competing branches that are:
  1. Angled too sharply towards the trunk
  2. Higher and thicker than the central leader

3) Lowest Permanent
- **Lowest Permanent Branch**: Branch at the desired height for clearance
- Select the lowest permanent branch. **City guidelines:**
  - 8 ft. over sidewalks
  - 14 ft. over streets
- Its width should be no more than ⅓ of the central leader's
- Choose a central leader with a good angle of attachment

4) Branch Spacing
- Remove branches that are too close together above the lowest permanent branch:
- Vertical spacing between branches:
  - 18” or more for large trees
  - 12” for small trees
- **Radial spacing**: No more than 3 branches at any height
- Remove branches that cross each other or point towards trunk

5) Temp. Branches
- **Temporary branches**: Branches below the lowest permanent branch that will be removed in the coming years
  1. Remove branches that are thicker than ⅓ of the trunk's width
  2. Prune back smaller temporary branches to 3 or 4 buds
  3. Remove suckers from the base of the trunk

Pruning Permits

A permit is required to:
- Prune or remove a street tree (10 ft. from the curb)
- Remove a yard tree with a diameter greater than 18”
- Remove Heritage Trees

Fines up to $3,000 may apply for pruning without a permit.

Acquiring a permit is just one phone call away!
Call (408) 794-1901 or visit www.sanjoseca.gov/tree/