

**Touch a Tree While Pruning**  
**Rick Abrahamson**  
**Week of January 18, 2010**

Pruning is the process of removing dead and diseased plant parts, encouraging flower and fruit production, and giving your plant a desired look or form. Most pruning should be done during the dormant season; however there are exceptions to every rule and pruning has lots of them. Prune oaks and elms during January and February; ash and birch during March. Early April is a good time to prune apple, hackberry, linden, poplar, dogwoods, viburnum, and spruce. Late April prune chokecherry, apricots, forsythia, and evergreens like arborvitae, juniper, and yew. From May through June prune lilac (immediately after flowering), potentilla, mockorange, and shrub roses. Don't forget to prune maples, walnuts, willows, and pines during this time period, too.

The most important point I can make is to prune for function when actually making the cuts to your plants. Cut out all of the dead, broken, and diseased material first, next any obstructing branches, followed by pruning for flowering and fruit, and finally shaping and beautifying the plant. Use only hand tools to prune, no chainsaws. If you need to use a chainsaw you have waited too long to prune. Always make your cuts to a main trunk, branch, or bud. Never leave a stub on any cut as stubs will never heal and are an excellent place for disease to start.

If you must make a cut to a larger branch use a three step process where the first cut is about six inches from the trunk on the lower side of the branch to almost half the way through the branch. Stop before the saw gets pinched. Next, cut from the top just to the outside of the first cut. This will cause the branch to fall to the ground and will not rip the bark to the trunk. Lastly, cut the stub off just outside of the bark ridge collar. This is the raised area around the branch where it attaches to the trunk. Do not cut into or remove the collar as this is where healing of the wound will take place.

This brings us into the botany of pruning. Branches elongate from buds and you can predict what direction the plant will grow depending on bud placement. Buds pointing into the tree or shrub will produce a more compact growth habit as opposed to buds pointing out which causes more spreading growth. Branch diameter increases from the cambium. Cambium is a single layer of cells that produce both xylem (wood) and phloem (bark).

With that being said, my main point would be to “use your head and then your hands” to prune trees and shrubs. Know what you want and make sure it is done right. If the job is too big hire a reputable arborist. In the words of Dr. Alex Shigo “touch trees – connect with nature” and “take time to think”.

If you have additional pruning or other horticultural questions feel free to call on me at 605-294-2188 or email to [ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu](mailto:ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu).