

Prune early, prune often, prune for safety

In Your Backyard Woods

All woody plants shed branches naturally—branches die, decay, and fall off. Sometimes they are removed violently by the wind, leaving large, ragged wounds. You can improve a tree’s strength, longevity, and value by periodically pruning its branches.

Why Prune?

Prune trees for safety, health, aesthetics, and value.

- Safety—Remove branches that could fall and cause injury or property damage, and remove lower branches on trees near your home to reduce fire danger.
- Health—Prune broad-leaf trees to develop strong structure that reduces the likelihood of damage during severe weather by favoring U-shaped branch angles. Also, remove diseased or insect-infested wood, as well as crossing and rubbing branches.
- Aesthetics—Prune trees to improve tree form and flowering.
- Value—Prune to produce knot-free wood for high-value lumber and veneer.



Dennis Haugen



Melvin J. Baughman, University of MN Extension Service

You can prune trees to increase their health, fire resistance, and value for wood products.

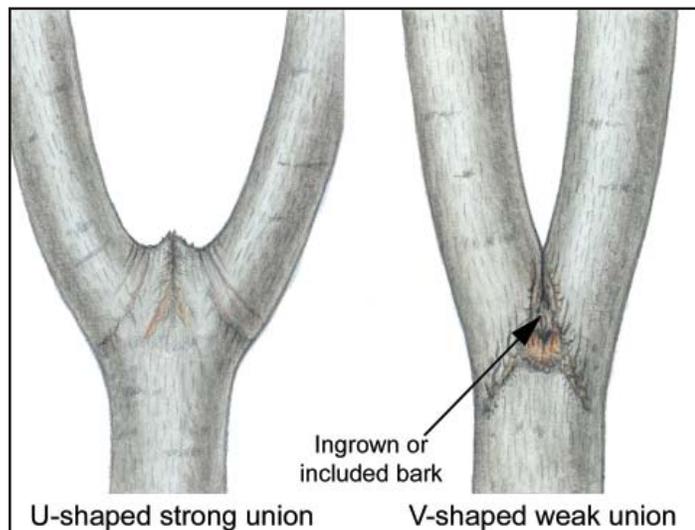
Pruning Basics

Prune young trees to strengthen their form, or increase their value, or both. As trees mature, prune to maintain tree health and safety.



Dennis Haugen

Needle-leaf trees (such as pines and spruces), which have branches in whorls around the trunk, don't need structural pruning as broad-leaf trees do. Needle-leaf trees are pruned to increase their fire resistance, increase their wood product value, and reduce losses from some diseases.



U-shaped strong union V-shaped weak union

Dead branches can be removed at any time of the year. Pruning needle-leaf trees during the dormant season minimizes sap and resin flow. Prune most broad-leaf trees during the dormant season.

Treating Wounds

Although it looks bad, sap flowing from pruning wounds generally is not harmful. In fact, trees produce sap, gums, and resins to combat disease. Wound dressings will not stop decay or cure diseases. The only benefit of wound dressings is to prevent introduction of Dutch elm disease and oak wilt, which are transmitted by infected insects feeding on fresh tree wounds. If possible, prune oak and elm trees during the dormant season to prevent the spread of disease and the need for wound dressing.



Chris Coulton, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

In the Forest

Trees are pruned in public and private forests to increase value. Pruning is the forester's "value-added" effort, because it produces higher-quality boards and veneer. Pruning is time consuming and, therefore, expensive. Foresters select only the highest value tree species on the best growing sites for pruning. Although pruning is done primarily to enhance tree value, it can fulfill other objectives such as increasing fire resistance, eliminating safety hazards, improving access, and reducing certain diseases.

Did You Know . . . ?

The eastern white pine is so naturally tall, straight, and clear of lower limbs when it grows in the woods that it was frequently cut for ship masts during the 1700s and 1800s.

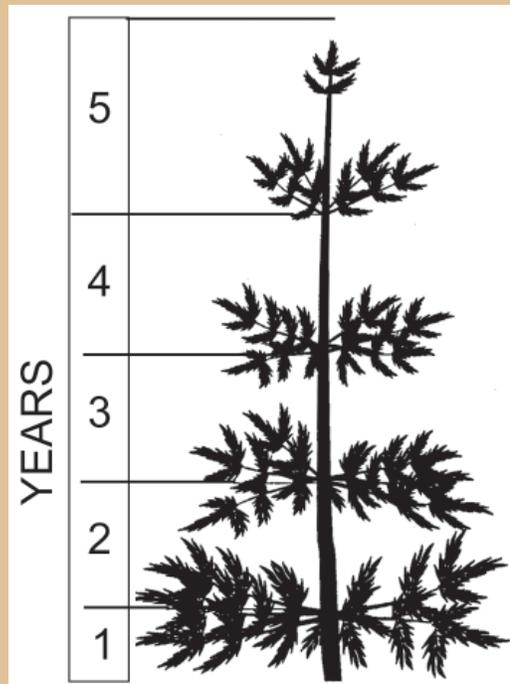
Family Activity: Old as the Hills

Learn how old a needle-leaf tree is by counting the branch whorls! Many needle-leaf trees put on one whorl (circle of branches around the stem) each year. Find some young pine, fir, or spruce in your woods with your family. (This doesn't work with cedar or hemlock trees.) It works best on trees under 30 years of age. Count the whorls and *voila!* You have the age of a needle-leaf tree.

Now, search your woods together to find a needle-leaf tree that is . . .

- The same age as the child.
- Just a baby!
- Equal to your age minus the child's.
- The oldest one.

Point out that trees in your woods can be many different ages. Believe it or not, size does not always correspond to age. Trees able to compete successfully for sunlight, nutrients, and water grow taller and put on more girth than their counterparts. Sometimes the large trees may not be the oldest, just the best competitors.



University of Minnesota Extension Service