

Proper Pruning

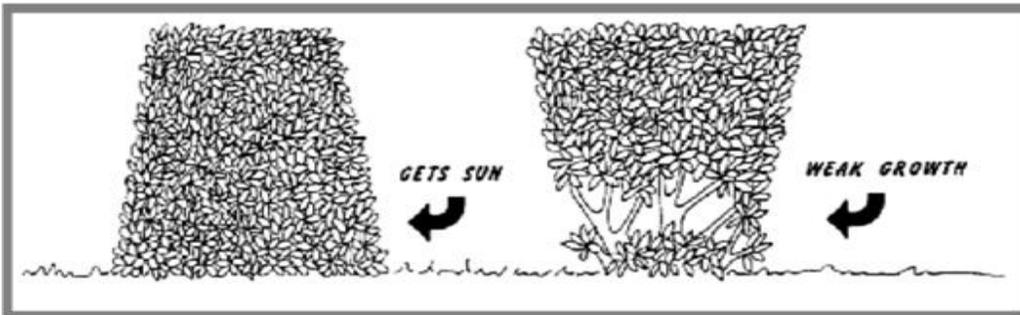
Compiled by Jane Morse, UF/IFAS Extension, Pinellas County

Here are some things you can do to prune like a professional.

First, it's about timing. Plants that produce flowers on this year's growth (new wood) are usually pruned while still dormant (January/February) or just before the spring growth flush. To encourage the most plant growth, prune just prior to the first spring growth flush. To slow growth and keep plants smaller, prune just after each growth flush. Most evergreens such as podocarpus, holly, ligustrum, juniper and wax myrtle can be pruned any time.

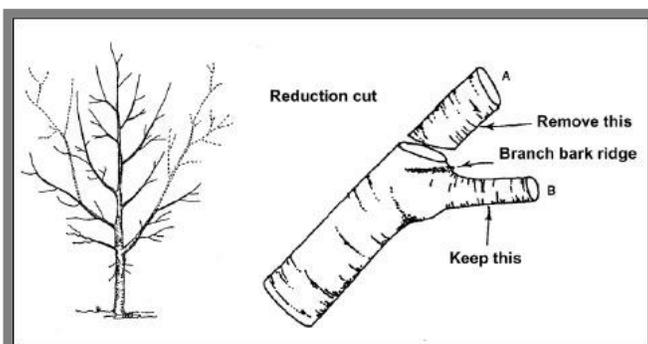
Plants that produce their flowers on last year's growth (old wood) must be pruned soon after they bloom. Pruning must stop 3 to 4 months after bloom when the new buds start to form. If you prune after this you won't get any flowers the coming year.

Pruning in the late fall or early winter causes tender new growth that can be damaged from cold weather or even a light frost.

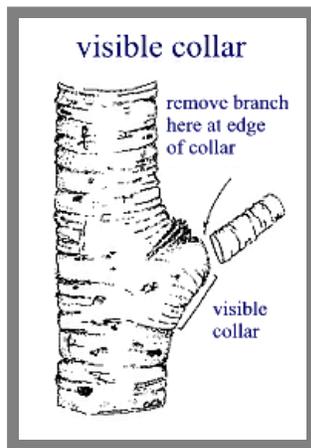
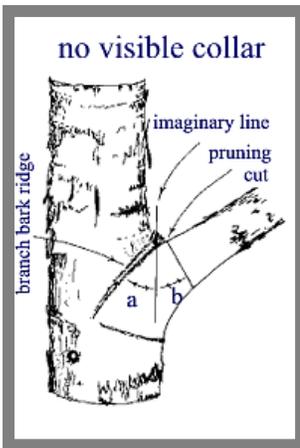


Second, it's about shape. Shrubs should be pruned so that the base is slightly wider than the top. This allows sunlight to reach all the leaves and will thus produce a plant that has leaves from top to bottom, rather than the shabby looking shrub that has no leaves at its base.

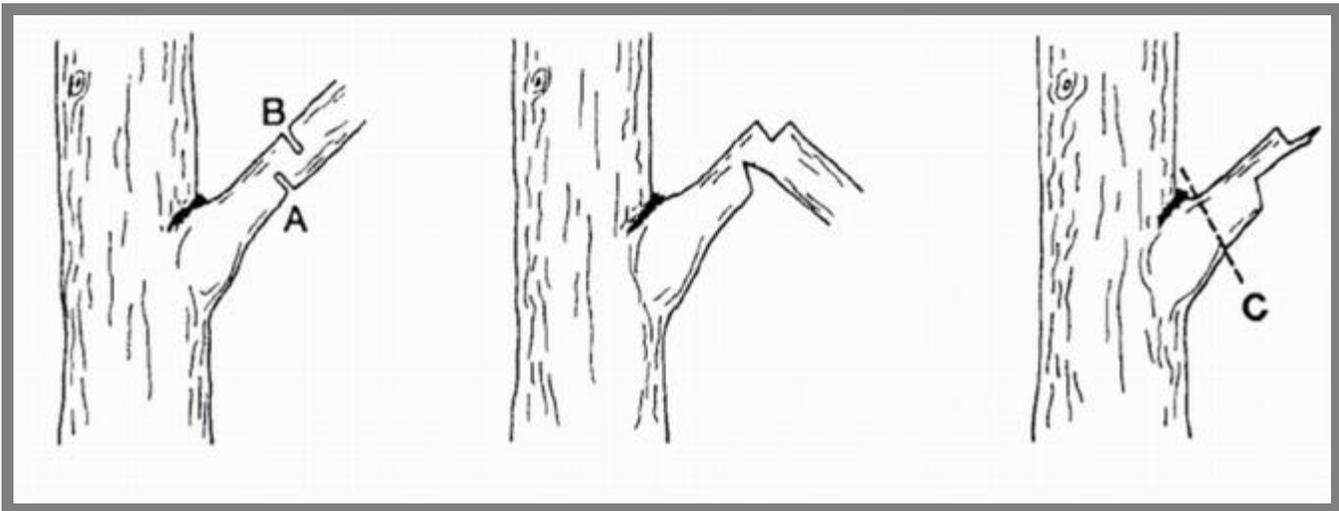
Trees should be pruned so there is only one major trunk with evenly spaced side branches. Removing all the interior branches of trees, called lion-tailing, is a harmful practice and should be avoided. Thinning is done from the outside in, not the inside out. Another good rule to follow is to remove no more than 1/3 of a plant's entire mass when pruning.



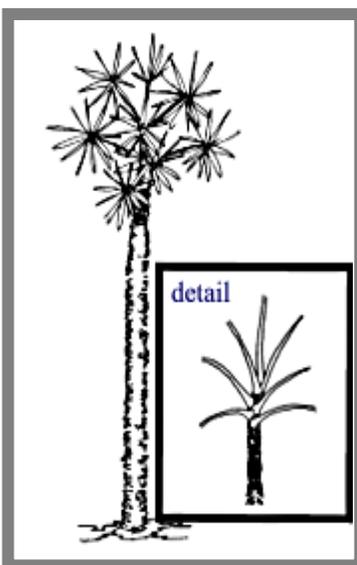
Third, it's about the cut. There are only 2 proper cuts. One is called a reduction cut and it removes a larger branch back to a smaller side branch.



The second type is called a removal cut and it removes a side branch from a larger branch. Cuts should be outside the collar and should never be made flush against the trunk. Flush cuts are harmful and improper.



When removing branches that are 1 ½ inch diameter or larger, use the 3-cut method. This keeps the branch from ripping down the side of the trunk. This method starts with a cut (A) on the underside of the branch about 15 inches from the trunk. The 2nd cut (B) is made downward from the top of the branch a few inches out from, or directly over the first cut. The 3rd cut (C) is the final removal cut of the stub that is left.



Palms that have any kind of nutrient deficiency (very common) should have only totally brown, dead fronds removed. Those with proper nutrition (very rare) should never have petioles (branches) removed from the trunk that are straight out and parallel to the ground (see detail left) or above those that are parallel to the ground. Those petioles below parallel may be removed.

Fatal plant diseases can be spread with infected pruning tools. Be sure to disinfect your tools before pruning the next plant. When pruning out disease on one plant you will need to disinfect your pruning tools between each pruning cut.

For free help with your lawn and garden questions, the UF/IFAS Extension Pinellas County is just a phone call or visit away. We are located at 12520 Ulmerton Road, Largo next to the Florida Botanical Gardens and open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To speak with a horticulturist call 727-582-2110 Monday, Tuesday or Thursday from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 to 4 p.m. You can also visit our website at www.pinellascountyextension.org