

Plant Chat

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Pruning: First Aid for Your Trees

Pruning will help maintain the health and value of the trees you care for. One of the main reasons for pruning is to remove dead, diseased, and damaged branches. Pruning also improves the shape and size of a tree or shrub.

The best time to prune most woody plants is in the early spring, while they are still dormant. However, light pruning can be done at any time of the year. Broken, dead, and weak or heavily shaded branches can be trimmed, with little or no negative effect on the plant.

Young plants heal more quickly than older, mature plants. Small wounds also heal quickly. Prune small branches flush with the stem or large limb, if there is no bark ridge or collar. When pruning larger limbs, make the cut at a slight down-and-outward angle (see photo below on the left). Cut just outside the bark ridge or collar, without damaging the bark ridge. Do not allow the bark to tear away from the tree while cutting. With a light branch, it is easy to take the weight with the free hand as the cut is

made. With large heavy branches, several cuts need to be made to avoid damaging the tree. Once the weight has been taken off, the final cut at the stub end should be from top to bottom, to ensure the surface of the cut is neat. The photo on the left shows a properly pruned branch that is healing over. If the cut is made too far from the stem, leaving a branch stub, the branch tissue usually dies. Wound closure is de-



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layed because the woundwood must seal over the stub that was left. Weak branches may also develop when branch stubs are left (as shown in photo on the right). If you have a pine or spruce tree with a damaged leader or top, select one of the larger side branches, and gently bend it up and tie to a brace. Use cloth or other non-girdling material for tying. Cut back other side branches by about half so they do not compete with the selected shoot. As with deciduous plants, evergreens should always be cut back to a side branch or bud. Careless pruning often results in a length of branch being left projecting beyond the stem. This branch stub usually will die and delay healing of the wound.

For more information on pruning, read 'Pruning Trees and Shrubs' by Ronald C. Smith and Dave DeCock, NDSU Extension Service, publication H-1036 (www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/plantsci/trees/h1036w.htm). Another excellent source of information is: www.fs.fed.us/SPFO/pubs/howtos/ht_prune/prun001.htm

Mike Knudson, Forester

Ash Trees on the Defensive

Several species of ash are native in the Northern Plains. A recent report by the North Dakota Forest Service estimated that there are over 78 million ash trees in the State. Green ash represents 22 percent of all the live-tree species on forest land in North Dakota. Most of the urban areas in the State also contain a high percentage of green ash. In Minnesota, there are an estimated 900 million ash trees.

These ash trees may soon become an endangered species if the emerald ash borer should enter the State. This introduced insect was found this spring in St. Paul, MN. By early June, 59 infected trees were found in the St. Anthony Park neighborhood in northwest St. Paul. The infected trees have been cut down and removed.

The ash trees will be replaced by other species. Individuals involved in planning new tree plantings need to give serious consideration to using a variety of species. At the very least, green ash should be alternated with other tall trees which will match the growth rate of ash, depending on soil type. A planting with a variety of species will result in a healthier windbreak. A tree planting with diversity is less apt to be badly damaged by insect attacks or fungus diseases.

Precautions need to be taken to prevent the spread of the emerald ash borer. Minnesota citizens have been asked to not transport firewood, even within the State. Additional information on the emerald ash borer can be found at www.emeraldashborer.info. This website includes information from all States.

Mike Knudson, Forester