When to Prune

Pruning is generally best carried out whilst the tree is actively growing, ideally shortly after coming in to leaf in the spring, after the leaves have hardened. There are some exceptions: species such as Birch, Walnut and Maples, will 'bleed' sap in early spring and species belonging to the genus Prunus such as Cherry partially rely on the production of a resin or gum to aid in the defence against wound related pathogens. For these species pruning should occur in the summer.

If you are in any doubt about the best time of year to prune your tree you should seek advice from a tree specialist (i.e. a professional tree surgeon or arboriculturist).

Pruning equipment

Pruning equipment should be kept clean and sharp, whether it is a chainsaw or a pair of secateurs. Blunt cutting equipment will increase the effort required to carry out the pruning, which could lead to injury. Blunt equipment can also lead to more damage being done to the tree. Keeping equipment clean and disinfecting after use will help to prevent the spread of any diseases from one tree to another.

Care should be taken when using any form of sharp bladed tool in order to reduce the chances of injury. The manufacturer's instructions should be read and followed.

Wound paint is not recommended as it inhibits the trees ability to begin closing the wound. It also creates a microclimate favoured by wood decay organisms by trapping in moisture.

Accredited Tree Work Contractors

Tree work (arboriculture) requires a high degree of technical competence, supported by training and experience. For these reasons DEFA recommends that tree work is undertaken by well trained, competent arborists, experienced at the type of work being undertaken, e.g. tree pruning/tree removal.

For advice on who you should hire to undertake tree work visit www.gov.im/treeprotection and following the link to 'Accredited Tree Work Contractors'

Legal Protection of Trees

Under the Tree Preservation Act 1993 certain trees will require a licence to be pruned. Further information regarding these restrictions can be found in our leaflet 'Tree Felling and the Law'. Details of registered individually registered trees and registered tree areas can be found at www.gov.im/maps or by enquiring at the Department's offices in St. Johns (Tel: 01624 695701).

The penalties for illegal tree felling and limbing can be severe with fines of up to £20,000 per tree.

An application form to fell or carry out work on trees can be downloaded from the government website (www.gov.im). The application form contains guidance notes to assist with its completion and submission.

Pruning for Safety

If you are a tree owner you have a duty of care towards those who could be affected by your trees. If you are concerned about tree safety you should seek the advice of an arboricultural specialist who is qualified and insured to undertake tree risk assessments. **Please note that the Departments officers do not carry out tree safety or risk assessments.**

Whilst acknowledging that tree owners have a duty of care the Department recommends that the following principles are applied to safety-related pruning:
- trees provide a wide variety of benefits to society
- trees are living organisms that naturally lose branches or fall
- the overall risk to human safety is extremely low
- tree owners should take a balanced and proportionate approach to tree safety

Useful Contacts:

Forestry, Amenity & Lands Directorate
Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture, Thie Slieau Whallian, Foxdale Road, St. Johns, IM4 3AS
Tel: 01624 695701
E-mail: forestry@gov.im

Information

For further information on how and when to carry out a pruning cut please refer to the guidance available from the following websites:

https://www.rhs.org.uk/
https://www.trees.org.uk/
http://www.treesaregood.org/

TREE PRUNING

Introduction

Pruning is the process of removing branches to change the structure and form of a tree. The ability to change the structure and form of a tree can help achieve a harmonious relationship between trees and people, resolving some of the common place conflicts which occur.
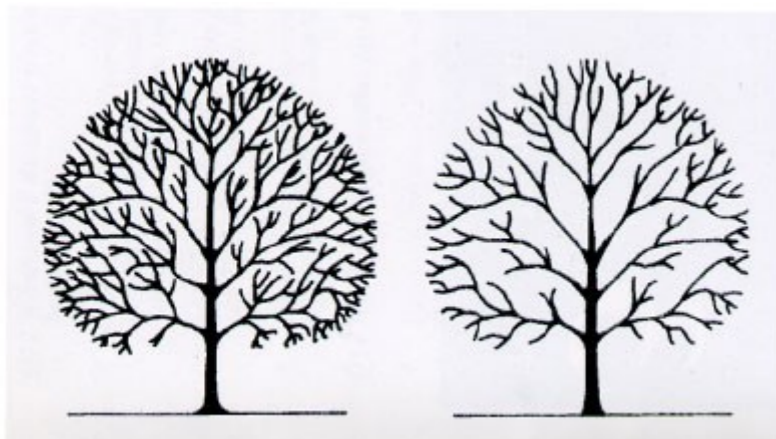
Properly undertaken pruning allows us to resolve conflicts without affecting the health of our trees. If carried out improperly, pruning can be detrimental to the growth and appearance of trees and can lead to damage that may severely shorten the life of the tree

Trees don't want to be pruned. Rather, humans want to prune trees to achieve a given objective. The purpose and objectives of pruning should be established before any work begins.
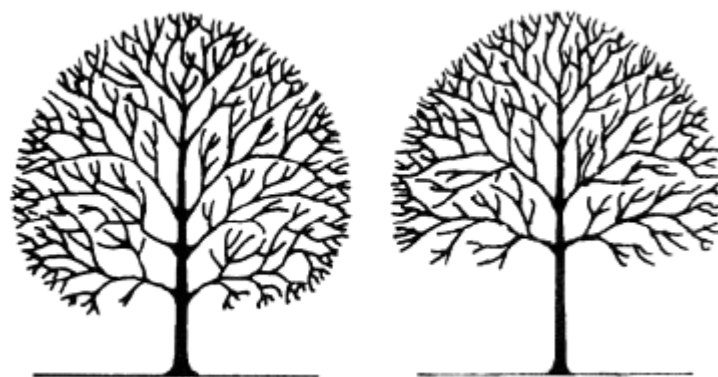
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Good Practice Pruning

Good practice pruning operations include the following:

Crown thinning – the removal of a portion of smaller/tertiary branches, usually at the outer crown, to produce a uniform density of foliage around an evenly spaced branch structure:

Crown lifting/ raising – the removal of the lowest branches to achieve a specified height clearance:

Crown reduction – a reduction in the height and/or spread of the crown:

Selective pruning – individually removing or shortening specific branches
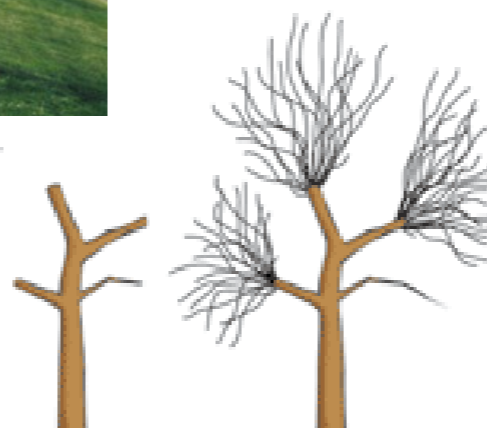
Bad Practice Pruning: Topping

Topping is the removal of the crown of a mature tree by indiscriminately cutting through the main stem(s) and structural branches. Topping is often used to drastically reduce the size of a tree by removing most of or all the leaf bearing material.

DEFA do not recommend topping for the following reasons;

- Topping will not make trees safe - it can actually create hazardous tree situations.
- By removing all of the tree's leaf bearing material, topping severely limits a tree's ability to produce food for itself by photosynthesis.
- Topping creates a point of entry for disease, insects, defects and rot that may detrimentally impact the health and structural integrity of trees
- Topping is unlikely to be a cost effective solution in the long term as the tree will require an on-going cyclic schedule of maintenance to prevent the issue re-occurring.
- Topping a tree creates a visually unattractive feature in the streetscape and/or landscape.

Topping produces clumps of uncontrolled growth and looks un-sightly

Industry Best Practice

General recommendations on tree work are provided by the British Standards Institution in BS3998:2010, *Tree work – recommendations.* Section 7 of this document, entitled *Pruning and related work,* provides detailed guidance on pruning best practice.

A competent tree professional should be aware of these recommendations and if anybody claims to comply with this standard they are expected to be able to justify any work that deviates from the recommendations.

Making the cut

Each and every cut made to a tree becomes a potential entry point for spores, diseases, insects and rot. Therefore it is important that cuts are made as small as possible and as few as possible to minimise potential damage and allow the tree to start recovery.

Correctly placed pruning cuts allow the tree to begin sealing the wound. To increase the chances of new growth covering the cut surface the cut should be made at a point close to a retained branch or bud. 'Snags' or 'stubs' are more likely to cause dieback and prevent sealing process. The final cut should not cut in to the 'branch collar' around the base of the branch and should be made at an angle which reduces the surface area of the cut.

To avoid tearing the bark heavy branches should be removed in sections using a 'step cut', where an undercut is made before cutting the limb from above. The final cut should be neat and made on one plane.

Research has shown that wound paints can actually inhibit a trees ability to seal off a wound, increasing the risk of decay by trapping moisture behind the painted seal. Therefore the application of wound paint should be avoided.