

# Pruning Guide |



Proper pruning is beneficial to a tree's development. This guide is intended to describe how young trees should be pruned. For mature or larger trees it is best to hire a certified arborist.

It is illegal to prune or remove a street tree without a permit. To apply for a permit, contact the City Arborist's office at (408) 794-1901 or [www.sanjoseca.org/tree](http://www.sanjoseca.org/tree).

## When To Prune

Prune after leaves have fallen or following the coldest part of winter, before buds open. Avoid pruning in summer and fall.

## Proper Structure

**Radial Spacing:** No more than 3 branches attached at the same height

**Branch Angles:** Parallel branches should be about 30° or more apart on opposite ends of the trunk

10:00 And 2:00 Positions  
Are Ideal For Branches  
At the Same Height



### REMOVE INCLUDED BARK



**Included Bark:** When a branch is attached at a narrow angle to the trunk or another branch



### ALWAYS PRUNE THE BRANCH BACK TO:



- A: Bud
- B: Connection With Another Branch
- C: Trunk

## The Proper Cut

Cut just outside the branch collar. If done correctly, the leftover tissue will form a proper scar to prevent future disease or damage to the trunk.

### PROPER PRUNER TECHNIQUE

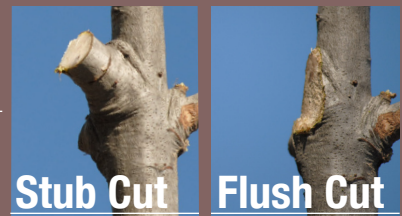


- 1: Find A Branch You Want To Prune
- 2: Place Pruners Right Outside Branch Collar
- 3: A Correct Cut Leaves Branch Bark Ridge & Branch Collar Intact

### IMPROPER CUTS

#### Stub Cut

Don't Leave Too Much Tissue After the Cut



#### Flush Cut

Don't Cut Into The Branch Collar

When a branch is too thick for pruners and requires a saw, use the Three Cut Method.

### THREE CUT METHOD

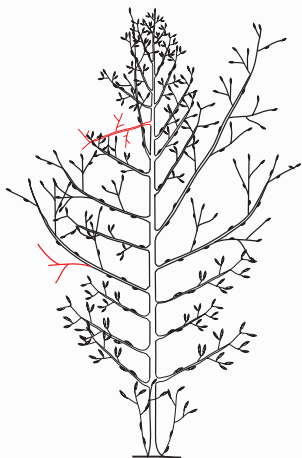
- 1: Partially Cut From Beneath
- 2: Cut Several Inches Above And Allow Limb To Fall
- 3: Cut Just Outside the Branch Collar



# The Five-Step Process

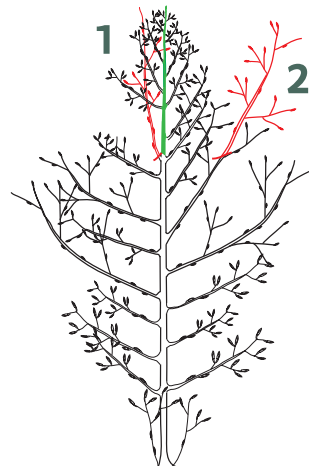
Follow these steps to give your tree its best chance at a long, well structured life with fewer issues of broken branches, rot, and obstructions. Remember, never remove more than 25% of a tree's canopy!

## 1) The Four D's



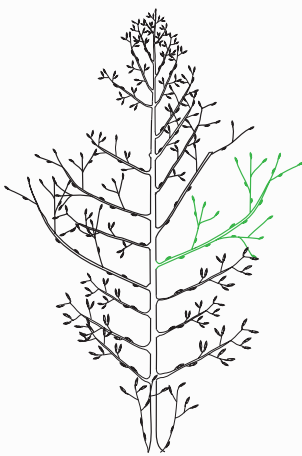
- Remove dead, dying, damaged, or diseased branches
- If unsure if the branch or tree is alive: scratch off a tiny piece of bark; if the tissue is green the branch is alive.

## 2) Central Leader



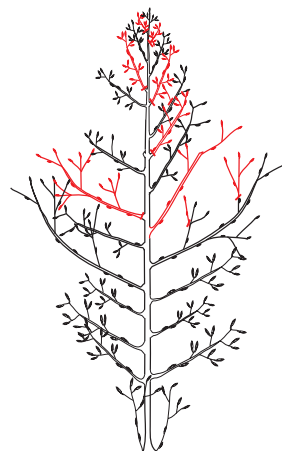
- Select a central leader-ideally the strongest, tallest, most vertical stem in line with trunk (green)
- Remove or cut back competing branches that are:
  1. Angled too sharply towards the trunk
  2. Higher and thicker than the central leader

## 3) Lowest Permanent



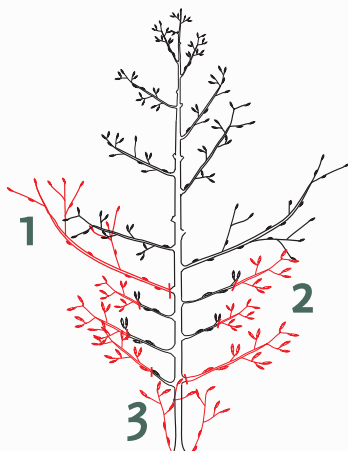
- **Lowest Permanent Branch:** Branch at the desired height for clearance
- Select the lowest permanent branch. *City guidelines:*
  - 8 ft. over sidewalks
  - 14 ft. over streets
- Its width should be no more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the central leader's
- Choose a central leader with a good angle of attachment

## 4) Branch Spacing



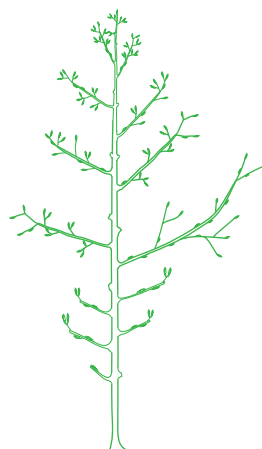
- Remove branches that are too close together above the lowest permanent branch:
- Vertical spacing between branches:
  - 18" or more for large trees
  - 12" for small trees
- **Radial spacing:** No more than 3 branches at any height
- Remove branches that cross each other or point towards trunk

## 5) Temp. Branches



- **Temporary branches:** Branches below the lowest permanent branch that will be removed in the coming years
  1. Remove branches that are thicker than  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the trunk's width
  2. Prune back smaller temporary branches to 3 or 4 buds
  3. Remove suckers from the base of the trunk

## Pruning Permits



- A permit is required to:**
- Prune or remove a street tree (10 ft. from the curb)
  - Remove a yard tree with a diameter greater than 18"
  - Remove Heritage Trees
- Fines up to \$3,000 may apply for pruning without a permit.

Acquiring a permit is just one phone call away!  
Call (408) 794-1901 or visit [www.sanjoseca.gov/tree/](http://www.sanjoseca.gov/tree/)