

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
By Bill Arndorfer
Grundy County Extension Education Director
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I ran across this letter to “Dr. Grow-It-All” and thought you might find it interesting.

Maybe you know someone who approaches pruning in much the same way. “Dr. Grow – It–All” is actually James Romer, Extension Horticulturist at Iowa State University. I hope you enjoy the letter.

Dear Dr. Grow-It-All: Every year my Mom takes it upon herself to absolutely hack the trees in our backyard. She calls it pruning. I call it butchering. If this was a football game, there would most certainly be a foul for illegal use of the pruning saw or false start of the chainsaw. It's so bad that we fear for our lives. I love my Mom and I love the trees, but I can't figure out a way in which to tell her to put the chainsaw down and let the trees be.

Help me please!! **Out On A Limb in Forest Home**

Dear Out On A Limb: The late dormant period (February to early April) is an excellent time to prune deciduous trees. The absence of foliage at this time of year gives the home gardener a clear view of the tree and allows him/her to select and remove appropriate branches. Also, the "healing" processes (wound compartmentalization and callus formation) occur most rapidly just prior to the onset of growth in spring. Proper pruning improves the appearance, maintains the health and prolongs the life of trees. Improper pruning destroys their natural beauty, weakens them and may lead to their premature death.

It is essential to make proper cuts when pruning trees. Do not make flush cuts. These are types of cuts made as close as possible to the trunk or main branch. Flush cuts produce large wounds, destroy the tree's natural mechanisms that promote healing, and slow the healing process. When pruning trees, make the final cut just beyond the branch collar and branch bark ridge. The branch collar is the swollen area at the base of the branch. The branch bark ridge is the dark, rough bark ridge that separates the branch from the main branch or trunk. When a branch is pruned properly, a slightly raised area remains on the trunk or main branch. However, do not leave stubs.

Use the three-cut procedure when cutting branches greater than one-inch in diameter. This technique prevents the branch from breaking off and stripping bark from the trunk or main branch. Make the first cut about one to two feet from the main branch or trunk. Cut upward and go about halfway through the branch. Make the second cut a few inches beyond the first. Cut downward completely through the branch. Remove the remaining portion of the branch by making the third and final cut just beyond the branch collar.

Do not apply wound dressings or pruning paints to the cut surface. The application of wound dressings or paints doesn't stop decay and may actually inhibit or delay the healing of wounds. There is one exception to the no paint recommendation. That exception involves oak trees. Oak trees should not be pruned from April 1 to July 1 to reduce the risk of the spread of oak wilt. If you must prune oaks between April 1 and July 1, for example, to correct storm damage, apply a dilute latex paint solution to all cut surfaces.

Some trees, such as maple, birch and elm, bleed heavily when pruned in late winter or early spring. However, the heavy bleeding causes little damage to trees. (The trees won't bleed to death.) Eventually the flow of sap will slow and stop. Heavy bleeding of susceptible trees can be avoided by pruning in late June or early July.

The pruning of deciduous trees by the home gardener should be limited to small trees and the removal of smaller branches that can be reached from the ground in medium to large trees. Branches high up in large trees and those near utility lines should be left to professional arborists. Professional arborists should have the proper training and equipment to safely perform the job. Hopefully, this will help your Mom to avoid any calls of roughing the red oak.

I hope you enjoyed this “letter” and picked up some helpful tips along with “Out On A Limb”. For more information, contact the Grundy Office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.