

**INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY**  
**By Bill Arndorfer**  
**Grundy County Extension Education Director**  
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Over the past couple of weeks, I have heard radio ads from tree service companies reminding the listening audience that now is a good time to prune your trees. The dormant season (February to early April) is a great time to prune deciduous trees. The absence of foliage gives a clear view of the tree and allows you to select and remove appropriate branches. Also, the "healing" process occurs most rapidly just prior to the onset of spring growth. 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. 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.

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 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. 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. For more information, contact the Grundy Office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.