

Pruning Storm-Damaged Trees

Storm Damage Series

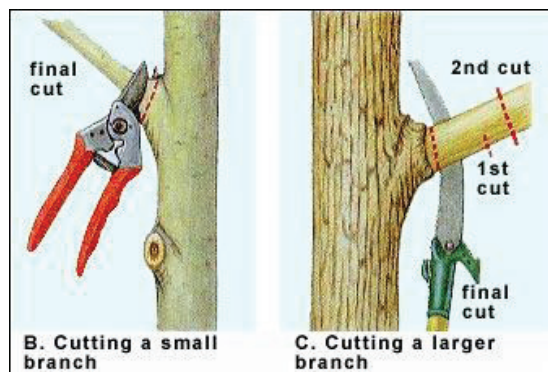
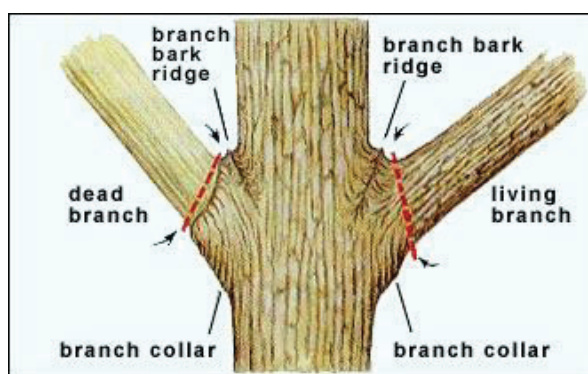
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The job of repairing trees that survive a severe storm and bringing them back to good health is critical. Before broken branches are removed, examine them carefully and use proper pruning methods to minimize damage from the pruning cuts. Branches that can't be reached from the ground, and essentially all work on large trees should be done only by professional arborists. (See *Storm Damage Bulletin #2, "How to Select an Arborist or Tree Service."*)

When to Prune

The only pruning that should be done immediately following a storm is removing broken branches. Leave the fine pruning

Before pruning, locate the branch bark ridge, which is created when bark is pushed up as the branch grows.



Branches should be pruned using a series of three cuts: two to remove the weight of the branch (first under, then over the branch), then the final pruning cut.

and finishing cuts until later. All pruning cuts will dry out to some degree if made during the winter. Dieback of the inner bark around a pruning cut can be minimized if final pruning is left until just before the tree begins to grow in the spring.

Branches to Remove

Safety is the first consideration in removing branches from storm-damaged trees. Remove all loose branches as soon as possible to eliminate the potential for injury or damage if they fall. Next, remove cracked or broken branches. Branches that did not break under the weight of snow, ice or some other damage, but are bent, may have internal cracks or other hidden damage, especially if the branches have not returned to their upright position. These branches may become hazards in the future and should be considered for removal. A branch (or trunk) that was partially stripped of its bark when an attached branch pulled away should be removed if more than a third of the original circumference is lost. These branches are structurally weak and may become serious hazards if they are allowed to remain and gain weight.

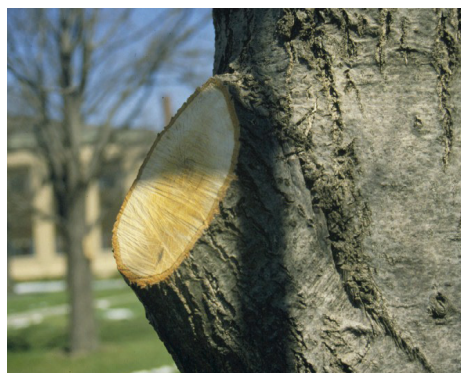
Branches that have pulled away from the trunk should be removed at the bottom of the split. Avoid causing any additional damage to the trunk. Remove loose bark, but



Joseph O'Brien, USFS



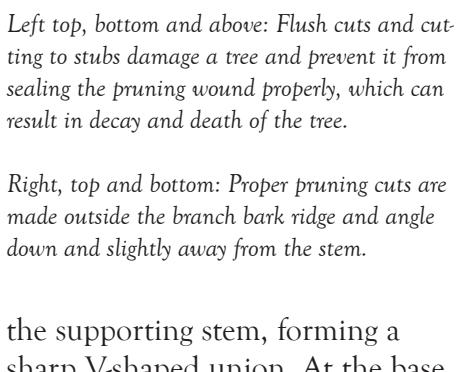
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Peter Bedker, Bugwood.org



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Left top, bottom and above: Flush cuts and cutting to stubs damage a tree and prevent it from sealing the pruning wound properly, which can result in decay and death of the tree.

Right, top and bottom: Proper pruning cuts are made outside the branch bark ridge and angle down and slightly away from the stem.

do not cut into bark that is living and still attached.

Making Pruning Cuts

Pruning cuts should be made so that only branch wood is removed and the trunk or supporting stem is not injured. If only branch wood is removed, the wound is smaller, the tree will be able to seal the wound more effectively and the chance of problems with wood decay will be greatly reduced. To locate the proper place to make a pruning cut, look for the “branch bark ridge” on the upper surface of the union of the branch with the supporting stem. This is a line of bark that was pushed up as the branch and supporting stem grew. Some branch unions will not have this if they didn’t form properly. Instead the branch will be pressing into

the supporting stem, forming a sharp V-shaped union. At the base of the branch, and mostly underneath, look also for the “branch collar” which is a slightly swollen area of stem tissue that wraps around the base of the branch. A proper pruning cut begins just outside the branch bark ridge and angles down and slightly away from the stem, avoiding injury to the branch collar. Do not make flush cuts that remove the branch collar. Wounds created by flush cuts will cause substantially more injury to the tree than wounds left by proper pruning. Branches should be pruned using a series of three cuts: two to remove

the weight of the branch (first under then over the branch), then the final pruning cut (see diagram on front page).

Pruning ‘Don’ts’

Never “top” trees. Topping is the indiscriminate cutting of tree branches to stubs or lateral branches that are not large enough to assume the terminal role. Topping creates serious hazards and dramatically shortens a tree’s life.

Never use paint or wound dressing to cover wounds. These materials do not help the tree and actually interfere with the tree’s wound-sealing process.

For More Information

Nebraska Forest Service
<http://nfs.unl.edu/treecare/pruning.asp>
 or
 International Society of Arboriculture
treesaregood.com

This series is based on a previous storm damage series researched and written by David Mooter.