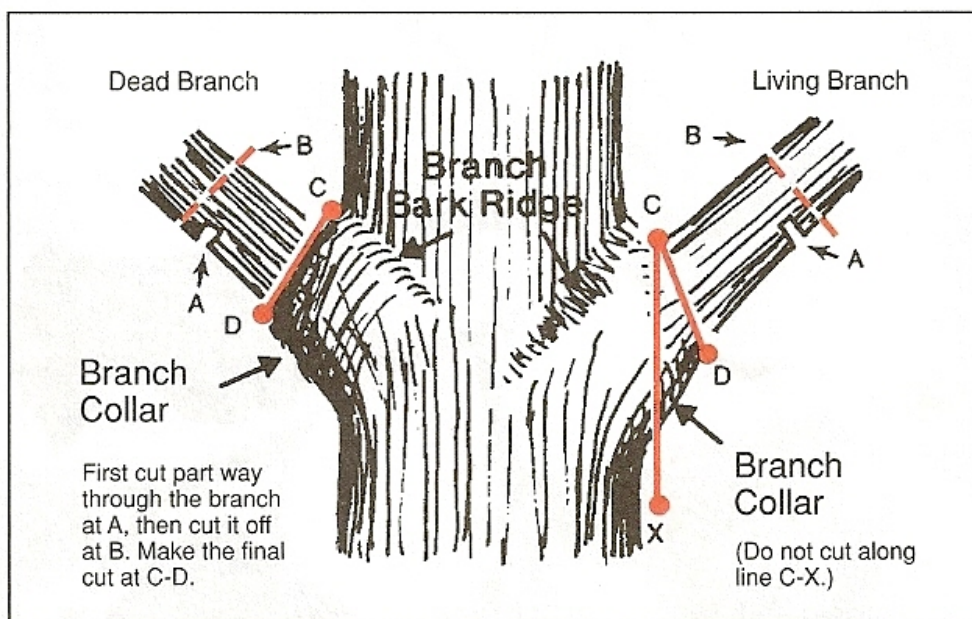


Archive for February, 2011

Pruning Time – Step 1

Wednesday, February 16th, 2011



Whether pruning a live or dead branch, it is important to make the pruning cut just outside the tree's branch bark ridge and branch collar. This facilitates natural sealing that helps the tree defend against decay.

The nearly two feet of snow in my front yard is nearly all gone, except for the piles where it was shoveled off the driveway and sidewalk, and the temperatures have started to moderate. It was 60 degrees last Saturday! The change in weather, from the first two weeks of February, have made me realize that the best time of year for pruning landscape trees is rapidly approaching (i.e. late February through March). Of course, you can prune almost any time of the year, if done correctly and prudently, but now is the best time to rid your trees of those errant branches – before the spring growth flush begins. Plus, it's not too hot for working outdoors. I know talking about hot outdoors right now may make you laugh, but it won't be long until we're complaining about the heat, with about the same fervor we've complained about the snow and cold. It's going to take me a while before I complain, however.

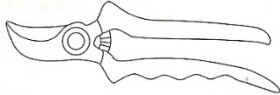
Before you rush to the garage or tool shed and grab your pruning tools, please step back and do a little preliminary thinking and planning. It will make your pruning task(s) much easier and efficient once you start clipping and sawing.

Step One – of course, you have already completed your identification of those branches that need to be removed from which trees. If not, get to it before you even think about getting out the olde loppers. In a

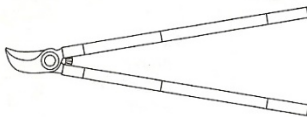
previous blog, I indicated what kinds of problem limbs you should target. Check back if you don't remember.

In addition, I also recommended taking care of your tools before storing them for the winter. Cleaning off dirt, sharpening edges and teeth, replacement of handles and/or worn out implements, buying a new pair of work gloves or safety glasses, etc. can make your pruning work much more pleasurable and efficient since you're not stopping to do these maintenance chores once you get started. Also, **most important**, make sure you have the right tools for the job(s), and make sure they're ready to go.

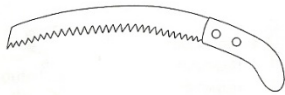
Use the Correct Tools



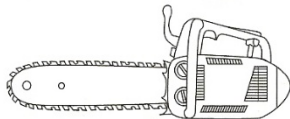
Hand pruners are useful for small branches, up to about 1/2-inch diameter. Use loppers or a saw for larger branches, or for species with hardwood.



Long-handled loppers may be used to remove larger diameter branches, but precise cuts are more difficult to make.



Curved blade pruning saws cut on the pull stroke. Newer blade designs are able to cut large and small diameter branches quickly and cleanly. Pruning saws are available with fixed or folding blades, or mounted on a pole. Larger pruning saws are sometimes used by professionals.



Chainsaws are not recommended for general pruning except by professionals as a time saver. (Consider hiring an arborist for large or potentially dangerous work.)

Get ready!

Pruning Time – Step 2

Wednesday, February 23rd, 2011

Prune Early – But.....Not Too Early

It is important to get newly established trees off to a good start, phenologically speaking. That's a pretty good two dollar word to describe their proper (normal?) shaping development, which is what you need to accomplish with early pruning. In fact, dealing with young trees may be the highest priority for your particular yardscape, if you do not have any hazard limbs or branches to take care of. However, it may not be necessary to start early pruning during the first or even second year after establishment, because the tree may need all the leaf surface it can get in order to foster good root system development. So, early pruning during years one and two should be very light and deal with only broken or dead limbs. Usually, early pruning, for shaping and development can begin in year three, and should concentrate on getting the branching development starting in the "right" direction for the species. Cross branching, bad angles, and other future problems can be shortstopped before the branches and limbs get too large in size; which makes them much more difficult to remove and potentially more injurious to the tree. Presented below is a drawing from the National Arbor Day Foundation that pretty well summarizes early pruning guidelines.

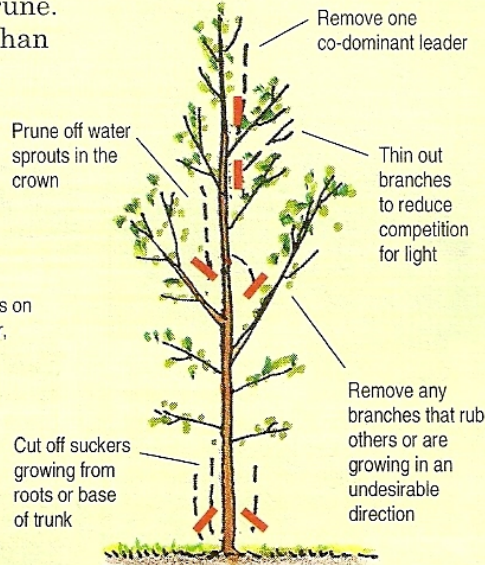
Prune with an eye to the future

As you prune, remember that the branches do not move up the trunk as the tree grows. A branch 5 feet from the ground now will be 5 feet off the ground in 10 years—only thicker and longer than it is now. Try to visualize what a particular branch will look like later, and remove any branches that will cause an obvious problem. Prune shade trees as lightly as possible and only when there is a good reason to prune. Never remove more than one-fourth of a tree's crown in a season.



Tree as planted

16



By age 3-4 years



By age 5-7 years