

Pruning shrubs and trees

When pruning small branches with secateurs, make sure they are sharp enough to cut the branches cleanly without tearing.

Branches that require saws should be supported with one hand while the cuts are made.

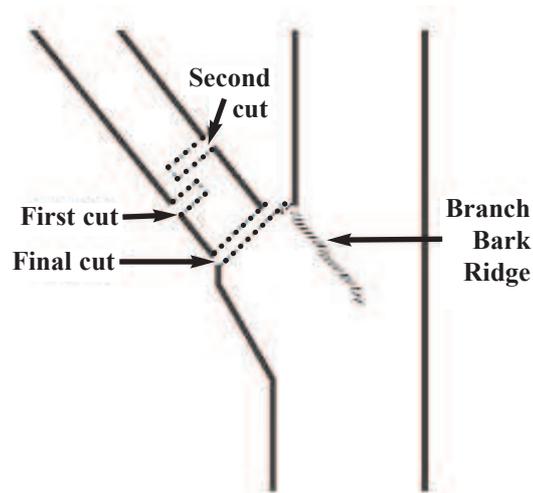
If the branch is too large to support, use the 3-cut pruning method to prevent bark ripping.

The 3-cut method of pruning trees

Cut 1.

This cut stops any ripping of the bark down the main trunk (and so prevents any subsequent infection).

- Cut the underside of the branch to be removed.
- Cut about 20-30 cm out from where the branch joins the main trunk.
- Cut in about a third of the diameter of the branch.



Cut 2.

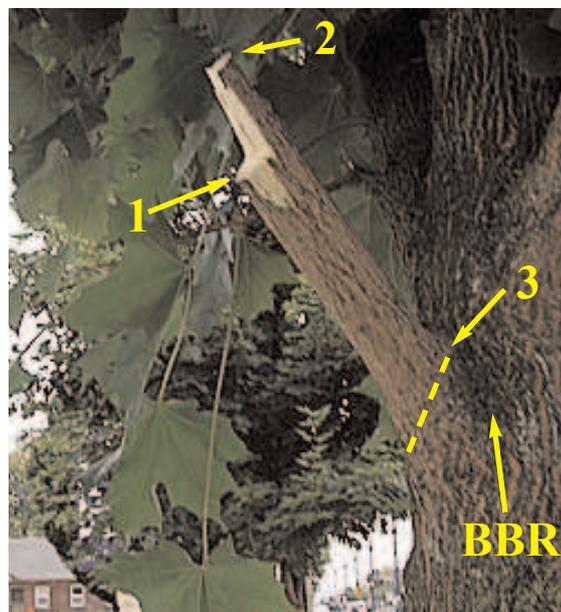
This cut removes the bulk of the weight of the branch.

- Cut on the topside of the branch to be removed.
- Cut about 5 cm further out from Cut 1.
- Cut all the way through (you will find that the branch will break before you can cut all the way though).

Cut 3.

This cut is the most important. It removes the remainder of the branch and, most importantly, allows the plant to heal properly.

- Cut the remaining stub outside the branch collar.
- The collar is at the junction where the limb joins the trunk and is (generally) shown as a swelling.
- Cut about 1 cm outside the collar.



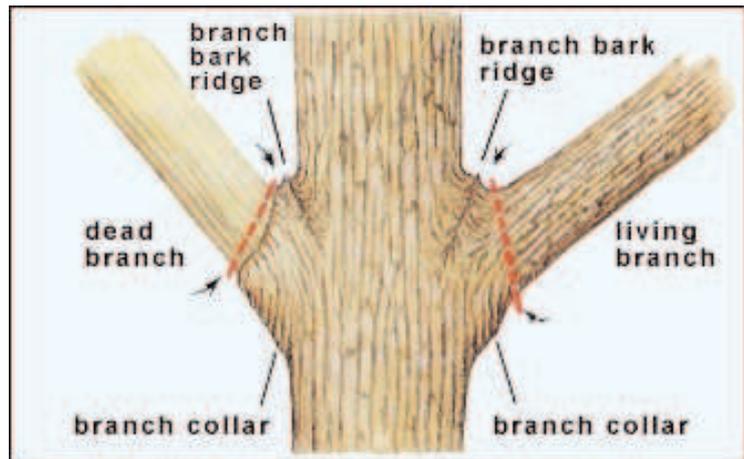
A tree being pruned - after Cut 2

If the collar is hard to find then look for:

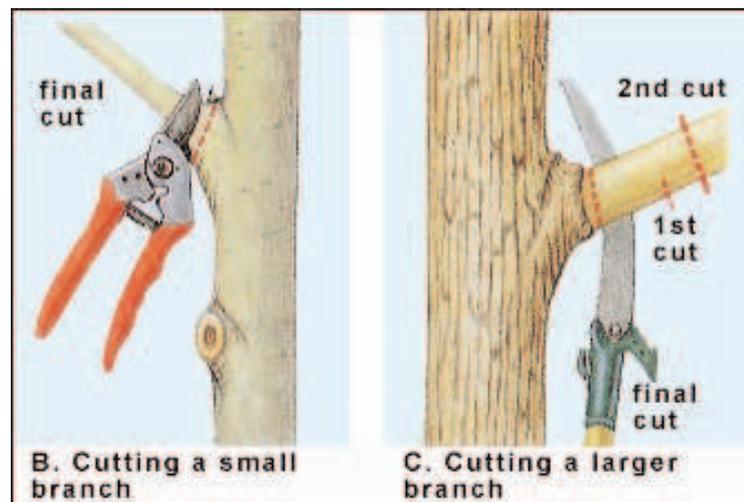
- some dead branches nearby as an indicator of where the collar is or
- the branch bark ridge and cut along a vertical mirror image of this.

More information

Pruning cuts should be made so that only branch tissue is removed and stem (trunk) tissue is not damaged. At the point where the branch attaches to the stem, branch and stem tissues remain separate, but are contiguous. If only branch tissues are cut when pruning, the stem tissues of the tree will probably not become decayed and the wound will seal better.



To find the proper place to cut a branch, look for the branch collar that grows from the stem tissue at the underside of the base of the branch. On the upper surface, there is usually a **branch bark ridge** that runs (more or less) parallel to the branch angle, along the stem of the tree. A proper pruning cut does not damage either the branch bark ridge or the branch collar.



A proper cut begins just outside the branch bark ridge and angles down away from the trunk of the tree, avoiding injury to the branch collar. Make the cut as close as possible to the main trunk but outside the branch bark ridge, so that stem tissue is not injured and the wound can seal in the shortest time possible.

- If the cut is too far from the main trunk, leaving a branch stub, the branch tissue usually dies and wound closure is delayed because it must seal over the stub that was left.
- If the cut is made inside the branch bark ridge or branch collar (**flush cut**) then healing will be delayed and there is an increased risk of infection.

Prune dead branches in is usually easy because the branch collar and the branch bark ridge can be distinguished from the dead branch because they continue to grow.

Wound dressings

Wound dressings do **not** prevent decay organisms from moving in. In fact the older tar-type dressings actually interfere with the natural healing process. So, leave pruning cuts dry and untreated. The key to good wound closure is proper pruning, making a smooth cut just beyond the branch collar and using the correct sharp tools.

References:

Colorado State University (www.colostate.edu); www.diy-life.com