



Pruning your trees - an Introduction

By David Rees of the Oxfordshire Woodland Project (adapted from their Off cuts newsletter).

Pruning is an activity applied to selected woodland trees in order to improve the quality of the log ultimately produced. It can also improve the appearance of some trees. Pruning has two main objectives: the removal of branches which will lead to forked stems and removal of over-vigorous side branching on favoured trees. Pruning is a compromise between removing branches before they create large knots and retaining a spread of branches forming the powerhouse of the tree. After removing forks, the next branches to remove are the lowest branches in successive years to leave a straight length of knot free stem. The rate of pruning should reflect the rate of growth of the individual tree so that work neither encroaches on the vital top half of the tree nor falls behind leaving large branches to be tackled in future years.



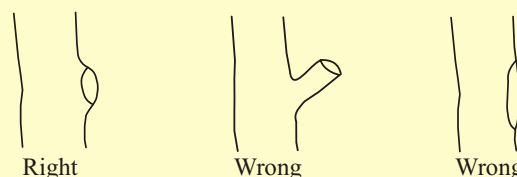
David Rees shows a large knot in timber

In general it is best to avoid pruning in spring when the sap is rising and when birds are nesting. Though pragmatists will argue that pruning is better done at any time than not at all different species are best pruned at different times of the year. In particular fruit wood trees e.g. the Cherry are best pruned in Spring when new growth can quickly seal the wound before airborne diseases can infect the tree.

The position of a pruning cut is critical in forming healthy callous growth over the cut. When a branch is cut from a tree, the tree responds by trying to seal the cut with callous tissue, just like a scab forming over a wound. Cutting a branch but leaving too long a stub prevents closure of the stem-based callous growth. The long stub will die back into the main stem and this increases the risk of rot getting into the tree. Cutting a branch too near to the trunk will remove the ring of tissue present around the branch and prevent the wound from healing over. To ensure successful

pruning, the answer is to cut just in front of the ring of tissue (the branch bark ridge). A well-pruned tree has a pronounced knobble where the branch once joined the stem. This disappears after a couple of years of growth.

Pruning illustrations by David Rees the pruning cut

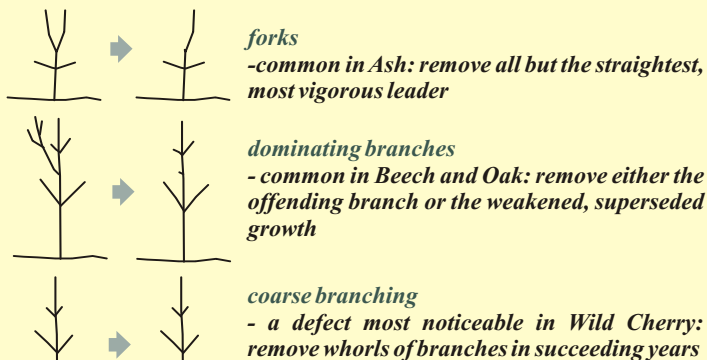


Cut as close to the main stem as possible without cutting into the main stem tissue: go for a clean and tidy knobble. Leave arisings in alternative rows.

Pruning can be tackled by the beginner with huge positive impact on future tree quality. Remember, it is only selected timber trees such as ash, oak, beech and cherry that need pruning. It can be done in relative safety, with a little investment in tools, is an appropriate form of exercise and can be carried out piece-meal whenever there is a moment to spare. Why not carry a pair of secateurs or a pruning saw with you when you walk around your wood so you can prune off the odd damaged limb as you come across them? Don't worry about the prunings but most importantly don't burn them. They will degrade to become the next layer of woodland soil.

Priorities

Remove forks and dominating branches anywhere on the stem before working up from the bottom.



We will be holding a series of Pruning Workshops with the Oxfordshire Woodland Project next year - if you would like to attend one contact us (or David Rees on 01993 814140) for more details.