

Pruning Trees in the Winter

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Why winter?

There are several good reasons to prune trees in winter:

- The foliage is gone and the structure of the branches is clearly visible.
- The tree is dormant, this will eliminate the bleeding of sap from the fresh cuts.
- In the case of oak trees, they should only be pruned during the winter. Freshly cut oaks emit an odor which attracts the beetle that causes oak wilt. This is a serious disease that often times will kill the tree. The beetles are hibernating during the winter.
- There are several other varieties of trees less likely to contract diseases when pruned during the winter months. Prune locust to prevent stem canker. Prune apple, crab apple, mountain ash and hawthorn to avoid fire blight.

Exceptions to winter pruning

As with any rule there are exceptions to winter pruning.

Trees and shrubs that prune in early spring should be pruned immediately after their blooms fade. Some examples of these are chokeberry (*Aronia*), flowering plum or cherry (*Prunus*), juneberry (*Amelanchier*), lilac (*Syringa*) and deciduous flowering magnolias.

Pruning Equipment

In order to prune a tree or shrub correctly, you need to have the proper equipment. To avoid injury to the tree your pruning tools need to be sharp. Dull cutters leave rough or jagged cuts which are an invitation to insects and disease. Here are some tools to consider.

- **Hand Pruners** – Used to remove small branches up to the size of your middle finger.
- **Loppers** – Used to remove branches 2 to 3 inches in diameter.
- **Pruning Saws** – Specialized saws with widely spaced teeth that can handle branches up to 5 to 6 inches.
- **Chain Saws** – Used to remove larger branches, and available in both gasoline and electric models in a variety of sizes.