

# Boston Tree Alliance Pruning Maintenance Guidelines

## General Guidelines:

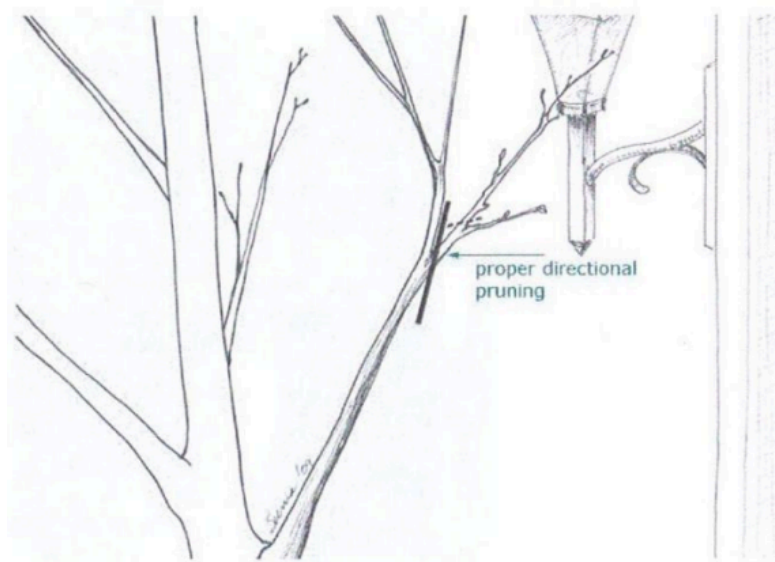
- **Training is REQUIRED before any and ALL pruning of BTA-planted trees**
- Never remove more than 1/3 off of any tree within a year
- Use tools that are sharp and clean
- Only pruning permissible on planting day is the removal of dead, diseased, dying, or broken branches
  - Remember to reject low quality stock
- Regular pruning shall begin no earlier than one year after planting

## Seasonality

- Most tree species are best pruned during the wintertime because:
  - There is better visibility of branch structure in deciduous trees, making form easier to see
  - Dead, diseased, crossing, and broken branches are also made more obvious
  - Disease spread amongst trees is lower if pruning is done in colder temperatures
  - Proper care should always be taken to keep pruning equipment clean especially when moving from tree to tree
- Other trees like maples are best pruned in early summer after peak sap flow to avoid "bleeding"
  - Look into best season for pruning the trees you have or speak with BTA or certified arborists for further guidance

## Pruning Goals

- While trees are young, it is ideal to prune to develop a healthy branch structure
  - Young trees are easiest and safest to prune as they typically do not require ladders or climbing experience
  - Pruning while trees are young can set the tree up for success as it matures
  - Knowing the natural form of your tree can help guide pruning decisions
  - Primary focus should be developing a central leader and evenly spaced scaffolding branches
  - Early work should be done to preserve or enhance any views or sightlines- preserving these will only get harder as tree ages
    - Make strategic choices when trees are young
- As trees develop it is important to prune for
  - Sightlines for pedestrians and vehicles
  - Remove “suckering” shoots that emerge from root zone
    - Trees will do this when stressed but shoots will deter resources from main stem
  - Directing branches away from lampposts, street signs and other utilities/items that further growth might hinder

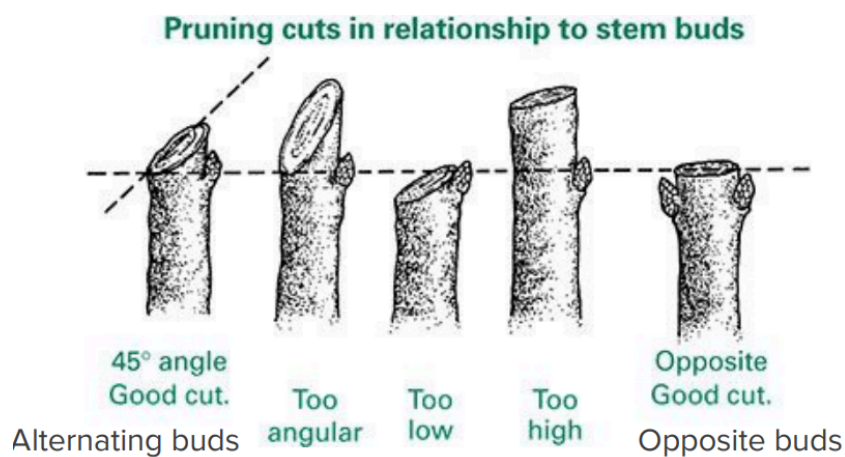


- Safety- remove any dead branches especially those that present threat to surrounding area if it were to fall
  - This becomes more important as trees get larger and branch diameter increases
  - Take note of landscape below trees to identify potential targets of fallen limbs
  - **If a tree that requires pruning is at a size where a ladder, aerial lift, or climbing is involved, have this be done under the care of a certified arborist or a team overseen by one and do not attempt this if you are not trained**
- Fruit trees have their own specific pruning guidelines to promote growth of fruit
  - Helpful resource for pruning fruit trees found [here](#)

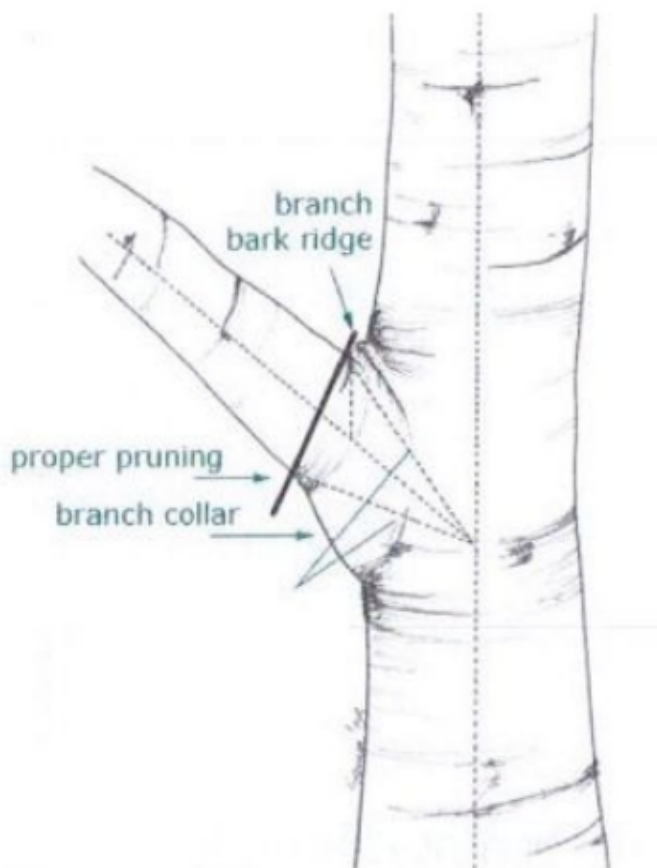
# Pruning Cuts

## Different species necessitate different cuts

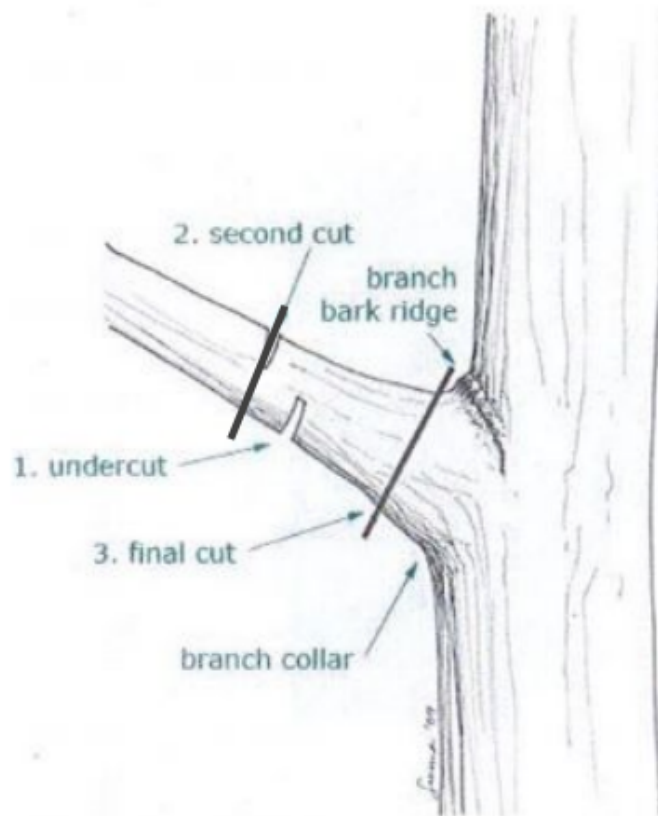
- Trees will have alternating or opposite buds located on their stems, these differences determine the angle of pruning cuts



- Tree limbs that need to be removed shall always be properly cut from the branch bark ridge to the outer edge of the branch collar as shown below



- If a branch is one inch in diameter or larger, a three step pruning cut should be used to remove it with a hand saw rather than pruners

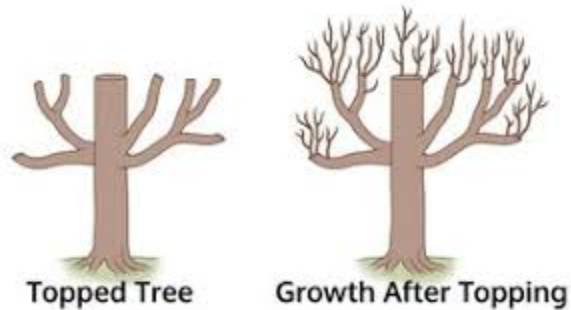


## Special Considerations

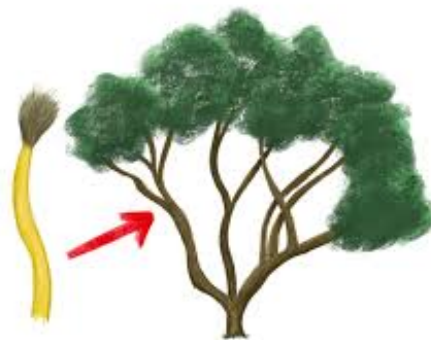
- If a major branch or central leader breaks for any reason, reach out to certified arborist or BTA to see what the best course of action may be
  - Some injuries to trees can be life-threatening and trees will have to be removed and replaced

## Improper Pruning Practices

- Pollarding or tree topping
  - This is a heading cut made on the central leader and other major stems of a tree
  - These practices reduces tree vigor, creates unnatural shapes, cause canopy loss, and can kill the tree



- "Lion's tailing"
  - This is a practice of removing all of the lower limbs on the tree leaving only top most branches
  - This uneven weight distribution can cause trunk to snap in windstorms as well as reduced vigor, increased likelihood of sunscald and other trunk-related issues



- Flush cuts
  - These are cuts that are made directly against trunk of tree without regard to branch collar
  - Cutting into branch collar will create wound that can cause severe rot and decay into main or secondary stems of the tree
  - Cut should leave a circle and not an oval on the branch or trunk



For more information, reach out to [bostontreealliance@massaudubon.org](mailto:bostontreealliance@massaudubon.org)