

Tree Pruning Tips

For trees in Minnesota, winter is regarded as the dormant season. During this time, most major biological processes within trees have either slowed or stopped completely. For this reason, the dormant season is the best time of year for most pruning to occur. Pruning in winter allows the fresh wounds exposed only for a short length of time where it can be impacted by few if any pests or pathogens. Pruning decisions are easier to make when there are no leaves obscuring the plant branch structure and trimming at the proper time can avoid certain disease and physical problems.

OAK

To prevent the spread of oak wilt do not prune oak trees during the months of April, May or June. If you need to prune during these times, apply shellac to the cut to mask the scent of fresh cut wood that attracts the disease carrying beetles.

Risk of oak wilt fungus spread by sap beetles

Time of year*	Risk of insect spread	Advisory notes
April through mid-July	High	Don't wound, prune or fell oaks in oak wilt counties during this time period. Immediately cover unavoidable wounds with paint or shellac.
Mid-July through late October	Low	Depending on weather conditions and insect populations, infections could occur but would be rare. Immediately treat pruning wounds, stump surfaces of felled trees and other wounds if desired.
November through March	Safe	Now is the time to prune! Fungal pathogens and insect vectors are inactive.

* Exact dates for beginning and end of each time period may vary from year to year.

Table courtesy of University of Minnesota Extension

ELM

In order to reduce the spread of Dutch elm disease (DED), avoid trimming elm trees during early April to late July. Branches infected with DED should be removed the same year the infection starts. Trees with many branches infected with DED should be taken down. Wood from DED infected elm trees should be buried, debarked, burned or chipped.

ASH

To reduce the spread of emerald ash borer (EAB), avoid trimming/removing ash trees from May 1st to August 31st during the EAB high activity season. Low/no activity season generally begins in October and run through April.

MAPLE

Maple trees can be cut anytime. Be sure to remember maple trees will "bleed" but this is not a harmful effect to the tree. They can bleed onto parked cars and be cosmetically unpleasant to look at. To avoid bleeding, trim during mid-summer or late fall.

You can trim dead or diseased branches on all trees at any time of the year. This will not harm the tree but will help the tree give nutrients to its growing branches. It is not necessary to spray the cuts of the dead branches with wound dressing.

Trim just outside the "collar" of the tree as it will heal and close the wound faster.

To help reduce the spread of tree pests and diseases, don't transport firewood from the metro area to greater Minnesota, when you go camping, or are buying it for home use. Buy the wood you need at local sites or at the campgrounds you are visiting.