Benefits of Proper Tree Pruning

Benefits of Trees

Trees provide a variety of benefits, both to the environment and to humans

- Trees sequester carbon, slowing down the effects of climate change.
- Trees provide important habitats for bird, insect, and animal species
- Trees reduce the amount of stormwater runoff, reducing erosion and pollution in our waterways, which can reduce the effects of flooding.
- Access to trees promotes greater physical activity and reduces stress.
- Trees produce oxygen and intercept airborne particulates, cleaning our air!
- Trees act as a natural air conditioner. The evaporation from a single tree has the effect of ten room-size residential air conditioners!

Prune for Strength – Use structural pruning cuts to remove or reduce co-dominant trunks and branches with narrow angles of attachment and broken or dead branches.

Prune to Withstand Windstorms – Trees that have been maintained regularly through proper pruning for strength and form will withstand windstorms better than trees that have been abused (topped or over lifted) or have not received structural pruning.

Prune to Prevent Bark Tearing – Branches should be removed by making 3 cuts to prevent bark tearing. The final cut should be made just outside of the branch collar.

Prune for Form – Remove or reduce excess lateral branches and sprouts, root suckers (branches that originate at the base of the tree) and branches that turn inward, are overextended or are rubbing/crossing.

Safety Tips for Homeowners – Never climb a tree to prune branches or attempt to prune branches near overhead powerlines.

What Not to Do – Do not:

- Leave branch stubs (this increases the likelihood of decay and poor branch structure).
- Paint wounds with pruning paint (it interferes with wound closure).
- Remove more than ¼ of the live crown in a single growing season.

Pruning Tips

- Keep 1/2 of the foliage in the lower 2/3 of the tree to increase trunk taper and reduce the potential for branch breakage.
- Pruning should result in even distribution of branches on individual limbs and throughout the crown.

Start Them Young

An investment in pruning trees when they are young to develop a single dominant trunk and strong branch structure can reduce the risk of breakage and reduce maintenance costs.

Shade trees that will become large perform best in urban landscapes when grown with one trunk extending 30' or more into the crown. Large limbs should be spaced along this trunk in a balanced, staggered fashion and not clustered together at one point.

Trees with competing stems (co-dominant leaders) can be pruned so there is one trunk to the top of the crown. Pruning in this manner at planting and every few years thereafter creates a strong tree with good structure and a single dominant trunk.

The one trunk in the crown center should be more visible after pruning.

Good Structure vs Bad Structure

Good - Single dominant trunk

Bad - More than one trunk: Removing or shortening competing upright stems (co-dominant leaders) back to lower lateral branches will encourage one trunk to dominate.

Good - Single dominant trunk

Bad - More than one trunk
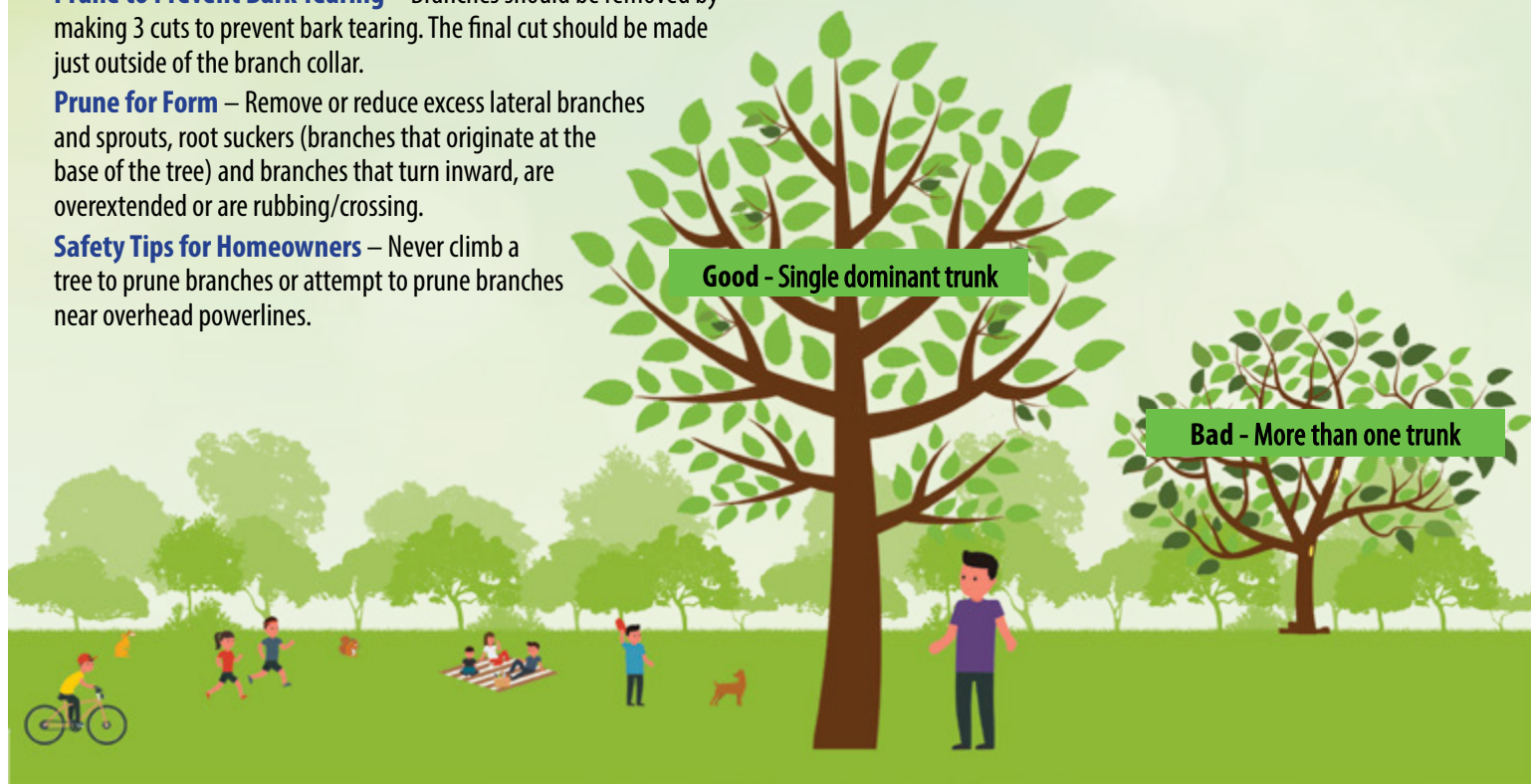
Preventing Tree Abuse

Topping/ Hat-racking

- **What is it?** When most of the tree canopy is removed; leaving branch stubs.
- **Why is it bad for trees?** It causes decay in the trunk as well as excessive sprouting below the topping cut. The sprouts may be weakly attached to a decaying column of wood. As the sprouts gain size in length and weight, the likelihood of failure increases.
- **How does it affect you?** Trees become potentially hazardous and will increase maintenance costs. They can also create liability for the property owner.

Over-lifting/Excessive thinning

- **What is it?** Removal of too many lower and interior branches of a tree.
- **Why is it bad for trees?** The center of gravity is pushed higher up into the canopy; making the tree vulnerable to higher wind speeds. The foliage is concentrated at the ends of branches which reduces branch taper, destroys the natural form of the tree, and it increases the likelihood of the limbs breaking.

Make the Proper Cuts

- Making three cuts as shown below can prevent branch bark tears which can injure the tree.
- The final cut should be made just outside the branch collar.
- Avoid making the final cut inside the branch collar. This is called a flush cut, which can lead to trunk decay.

Second cut (drops limb)

First cut (undercut)

Final cut just outside branch collar
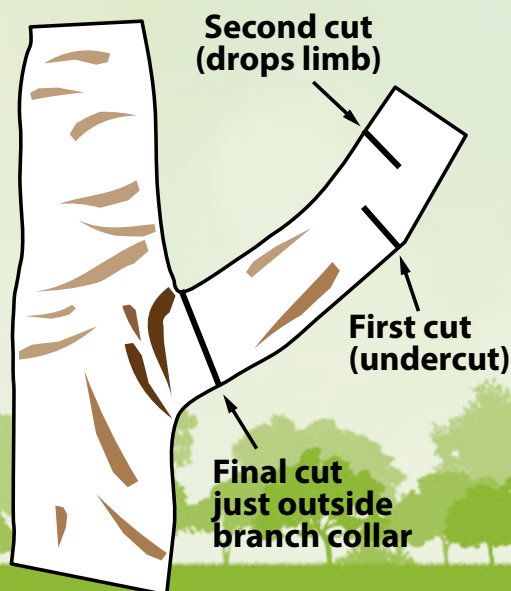
Choosing a Tree Trimmer/ Arborist

When contracting for tree trimming services, the contractor you hire should:

- Be fully insured for property damage, personal liability and worker's compensation
- Display their business name and phone number on their vehicle
- Be a member of a professional association such as the Tree Care Industry of America, the International Society of Arboriculture, or the American Society of Consulting Arborists.

Because trees are vital to our community's environmental health, they are protected by ordinance under Broward County Code (Chapter 27, Article XIV, titled "Tree Preservation and Abuse"). This ordinance sets minimum standards for tree pruning and sets restrictions on tree removals.

For information on tree trimmer training classes please contact UF/IFAS Broward County Extension at **954-756-8550** or *sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/broward*.

Tree Preservation Program
Water and Environmental Licensing Section
Environmental Permitting Division
Public Works and Environmental Services Department
1 N University Dr., Mailbox 201, Plantation, FL 33324
954-519-1483
Broward.org/Environment

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