

Branches and twigs of transplanted trees (except evergreens) must be pruned by about a third to balance the loss of roots when the tree is dug. Leaves lose moisture as quickly as roots can take it in. If roots are cut without the branches being pruned proportionately, the plant may die of dehydration.

Early spring or late winter--when deciduous trees are free of foliage--are good times to prune trees. At these times, you can see the arrangement of branches and can expect faster healing of large cuts.

Trimming can help the looks of your new tree, as well as improve chances of survival. Start by cutting off any diseased branches, crossing branches that rub, and broken branches. Remove young shoots low on the trunk and one of any two heavy limbs opposite each other.

Evergreens probably won't need pruning because the wrapped rootball protects the roots from injury.

First pruning

Start your pruning at planting time to aid in tree growth. A tree with no main branches (a whip) can be cut to a height of five to six feet. If you set out a tree with branches, select four or five thick, healthy ones about 15 inches apart and remove the others.

As the tree grows, cut off one or two lower branches each year until "head" (or main branches) is at the height you want. Young trees need leaves to make the food they need for growing, so don't cut off too many branches in one season. Even if they're unsightly or imperfect, the leaves are needed. If the lower branches are growing too fast for the trunk, trim them back for the first several years, rather than cut them off entirely.

After the tree reaches the shape you like, prune only to remove broken or diseased branches and thin occasionally.

Prune branches that might be on a collision course with a building or power line. If branches are cut when small, wounds will heal faster.

Small flowering trees

The smaller trees such as crab apple and dogwood, are pruned much like other trees, although two or three "leaders" should be left untouched. Most flowering trees should be pruned at the end of blossom time.