

Pruning a Large Tree Limb

The best time to remove a limb from a tree is winter, except in the cases of maples, birches, and other trees that produce copious sap. For such trees summer is a better time (in subtropical climates the end of the dry season is preferred). If you can easily reach the limb with a ladder, there is no reason not to tackle the job yourself. However, if you're thinking about climbing up into the branches to remove a limb, don't. This is dangerous task best left to professionals who have the proper training and equipment.

You can ensure your own safety by following a few precautions. Be certain your ladder rests on a firm base; if the ground is soft, set the ladder on some planks. Lash taller ladders to the tree and have someone hold the base of the ladder while you work. But keep other spectators away. And note where the limb will fall, making sure its drop won't injure people or plants. If its fall might damage a valued shrub, say, tie a rope around it, pass the rope over another limb higher in the tree, and lower the cut limb slowly to the ground.

The Case for Cutting

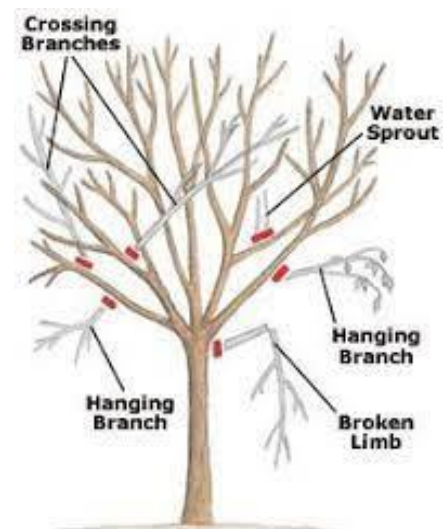
There are many reasons why you may need to remove a sizable limb from one of your trees. The limb may be damaged, diseased, or dead. It may be rubbing against another branch. Or it may just displease you; the tree would look better, you decide, without that particular branch.

Choose The Right Tools

Any limb with a diameter greater than one inch should be sawed. For limbs up to two inches in diameter or even slightly larger, and for limbs growing close another, a narrow, curved pruning saw is the ideal tool and is easy to use, as it cuts by a pulling rather than a pushing action.

For cutting larger limbs, a straight pruning saw with teeth on both sides of the blade can be used.

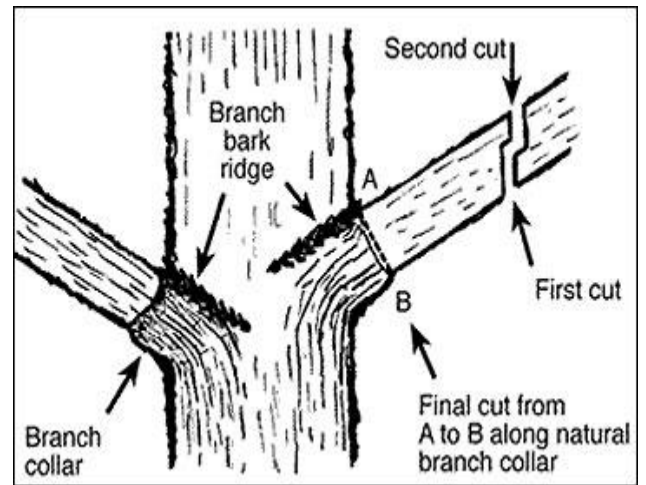
But handier for most amateurs (because it can be used for jobs other than pruning) is a bow saw, which has a detachable blade mounted on a C-shaped frame. In any case, do not use a chain saw, which is far too perilous for someone balancing on a ladder.



Make The First Cut Away from The Trunk

Make your first cut on the underside of the branch one foot out from the trunk, cutting upwards until the branch begins to bind the saw blade.

This upward cut will prevent the limb from tearing away the trunk's bark as the limb begins to fall. The second cut is then made from the upper side of the limb, an inch or so farther out. Cut straight down until the branch breaks off, which it will do as you approach the lower cut.



Make The Final Cut Close

Finish the job by removing the stub that remains. With larger branches you may want to make two cuts again. In any event, make your cut close to the trunk – just beyond the branch collar—and perpendicular to the direction the branch was growing. This ensures as small a wound as possible. If you can hang your hat on the stub that remains it needs further trimming. However, do not cut into the branch collar.

The collar provides a chemical barrier to decay and cutting into that area makes the tree vulnerable to infection.