

City of Kenosha Street Tree Pruning Guidelines

Pruning your street tree is important for many reasons. Proper pruning can direct growth, regulate size, promote health, and increase public safety by removing diseased, dead or dying branches. Since each cut has the potential to alter the growth of the tree, no branch should be removed without a reason.

When should I prune?

Most routine pruning can be done at any time of the year with little effect on the tree. Routine pruning can include removing dead or diseased limbs, broken branches, or weak limbs. Some trees such as maples and birches can weep sap if pruned early in the spring, but this does not hurt the tree. Oaks should only be pruned during the fall or winter months (October 1 to March 31) to help prevent spread of the fungus that causes oak wilt. The fungus invades the tree's water carrying system causing leaves to wilt and fall. Once infected, it is difficult to treat and usually fatal.

If the tree needs to be thinned or have major pruning done, do not perform this work in May or June. The tree has just expended a lot of energy producing foliage and shoots. Pruning at this time can stress the tree and a summer drought may be too much for the tree to overcome. The best time for heavy pruning is in late fall or winter when disease causing insects or organisms are not active. At this time, the structure of the tree is also easily determined which aids the pruning process. Do not remove more than one fourth of the total crown of the tree in any one growing season.

How should I prune the tree?

For trees younger than 3 years, the tree needs as many leaves as it can get to produce the energy required for healthy root growth. Pruning at this time should be limited to dead or broken branches or branches that compete with the central leader of the tree.

For trees that are 3 – 4 years old, root growth should be well on its way. Now is the time to remove suckers, sprouts and excessive limbs to reduce competition for light, water and nutrients. A few of the lowest limbs can be removed at this time, but do not remove all of them since this can result in reduced trunk diameter and strength. Occasionally a tree will develop double leaders known as co-dominant stems. These can lead to structural weaknesses, so it is best to remove one at this time.

For trees that are 5 – 8 years old, pruning for future growth is necessary. At this time, the lower branches are permanently established. The tree should be limbed up to keep these lower limbs out of the way of pedestrians and vehicles. Once branches are established on a tree, they do not move upward on the tree as the tree grows. In other words, a branch that is 6 feet above the ground will always be 6 feet above the ground. Branches farther up on the tree should be evenly spaced up the trunk wherever possible. Remove those limbs that cross others, double leaders, and those that excessively extend beyond the natural crown of the tree. Do not remove more than one fourth of the total crown of the tree in any one growing season.

For mature trees, little pruning needs to be done if the tree has been properly pruned when younger. At this time pruning is usually limited to the removal of dead or hazardous limbs. Some minor clearance pruning may also be needed. Arborists should be used for pruning these trees if it is required. Mature limbs are heavy and removing them can be dangerous. Power lines are often present in mature trees and only line certified arborists should work on these trees.

Proper tree pruning does not include topping

Topping is defined as the indiscriminate cutting back of large branches with little regard for the location of the pruning cut. Most often these branches are removed from the top of the tree. Topping deforms the tree, accelerates decay, and promotes the formation of poorly attached branches prone to breakage.

Pruning tools

When pruning young trees, it is important to use the proper pruning tool. For branches smaller than 1/2" in diameter, a bypass pruning shear is the desired tool. It makes better, cleaner cuts than the anvil type of shear. For larger cuts, use a lopper or pruning saw. Never use a hedge shear on your trees.

Wound dressings

These products are not recommended. It was once thought that they would promote wound closure and reduce decay, but, in fact, research has shown that dressings do not promote wound closure or reduce decay. The only exception is when it is necessary to prune oaks during the growing season when disease transmission risk is high. Tree wound paint should be applied immediately in this circumstance.

For more tree care information :
<http://www.treesaregood.com/>