

Prune with Purpose

Proper Pruning for Tree Health and Compliance

Guidance for Homeowners and Landscape Professionals

Monroe County
Department of Planning & Environmental Resources
September 2024



PROPER PRUNING MATTERS

Proper tree pruning fosters healthy growth and reduces the risk of branch failure, enhancing trees' resilience to wind damage. In contrast, improper pruning weakens trees, leaving them vulnerable to pests, diseases, and a shortened lifespan.

To protect our trees, Monroe County requires all major pruning to follow the 2017 ANSI Tree Care Standards, as specified in [Sec. 114-103](#) of the County Code. [Permits](#) are required for removing any tree or major pruning of trees over 6" in diameter at breast height. Excessive pruning is a violation and subject to code compliance action.

Following these guidelines helps protect tree health, improve hurricane resilience, and preserve the natural beauty of our community.

IMPORTANT: This brochure outlines the more commonly utilized pruning practices of the 2017 ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards, but is not an all-inclusive resource. The complete set of Standards is available through various retailers.

When appropriate, homeowners are encouraged to consult with certified arborists trained in the ANSI A300 Standard practices.

MAKING A PROPER CUT

Importance

When pruning cuts are made correctly, a healthy tree will compartmentalize and seal the wound, helping to prevent decay in the wood that gives the tree its strength. Improper cuts fail to close properly, allowing decay to spread, which increases the risk of limb failure or breakage, especially in strong winds.

Removing an Entire Limb

1. Locate the branch bark ridge and collar. (fig. 2)
2. For heavier limbs make 3 cuts (fig. 3)
3. Make final cut just outside of the ridge & collar and parallel to the branch collar. (fig. 2)
4. If collar and ridge are not present cut should avoid wounding the main trunk/stem.

Removing a Branch from a Limb

1. Cut just beyond the lateral stem. (fig 4)
2. Do NOT cut between nodes. (fig. 4)

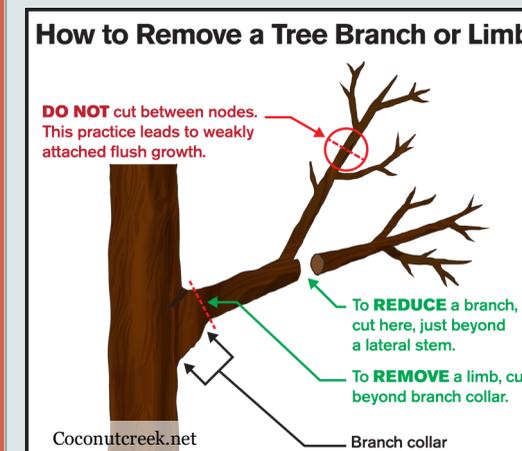


Figure 4 - Smaller Branch Removal

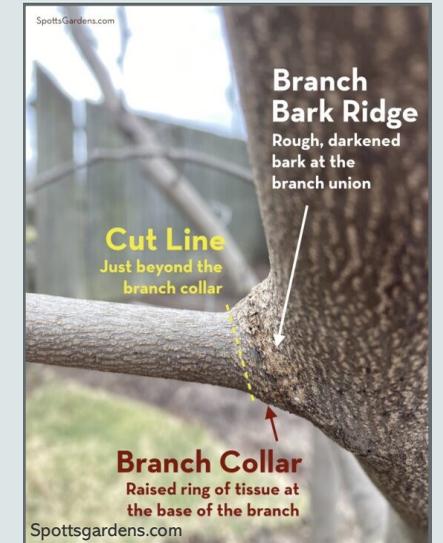


Figure 2 - Proper Pruning Location

3-Cut Process



1. Eliminates the branch from tearing back into the collar.
2. This removes the outer portion of the limb
3. Final cut outside the collar and ridge, allowing for proper sealing and healing.

Figure 3- The 3-Cut Process

TO COMPLY WITH ANSI 300 STANDARDS...

AVOID

- hat-racking or tree-topping.
- making unnecessary cuts.
- cutting off or into the branch collar (making a flush cut).
- lion's tailing trees (stripping a branch leaving foliage just at the ends)
- removing more living material than necessary for the objective (generally less than 25% for mature trees).
- using wound paint.
- pruning without a good reason.
- using climbing spikes

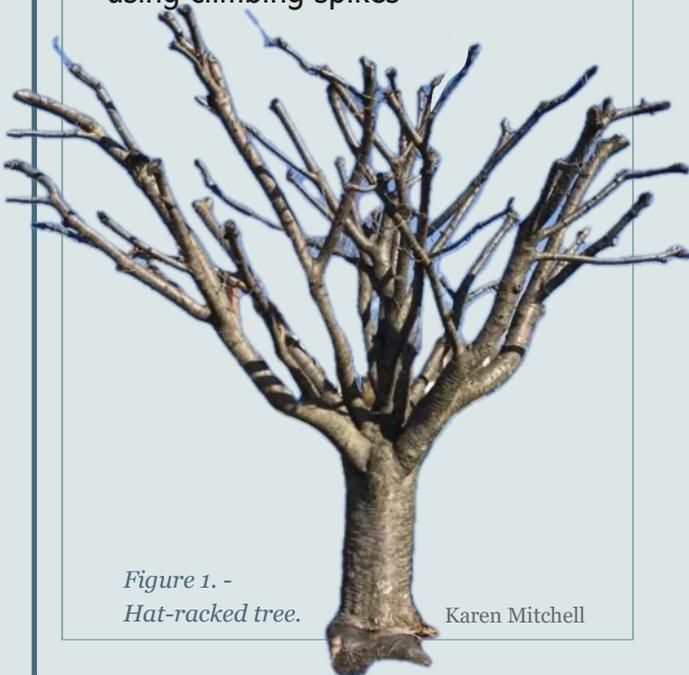


Figure 1. - Hat-racked tree.

Karen Mitchell

DETRIMENTAL/PROHIBITED PRACTICES

(EXAMPLES)

Tree Topping/Hat-Racking

Removing more than 25% of a mature tree's canopy in any one growing season is strongly discouraged, for good reason.

Removing the leaves severely impacts the tree's ability to make food. If the tree's stored energy is insufficient, it may struggle or die.

Surviving trees often develop decay in the trunk and main branches, attracting wood-boring insects. New sprouts are typically weakly attached, increasing the risk of branches breaking during storms, which creates hazardous conditions and possibly further damaging the tree.



Fairchildgarden.org

Ficus - 2 years post hat-racking. Central portion has died.



Fairchildgarden.org

Poorly attached branches caused by hat-racking

Lion's Tailing & Overlifting

Lion's tailing occurs when the interior growth is removed leaving only a cluster of foliage on the ends of branches.

Overlifting occurs when too many lower branches are removed.

These pruning mistakes are similarly detrimental as both remove excess foliage, the trees main food source, and create a top heavy tree that is more susceptible to wind damage.



Hort.ifas.edu

Figure 5 - Lion's Tailed Tree



Larry Figart

Figure 6 - Overlifting

PALM PRUNING

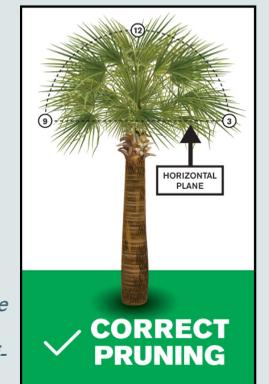
While technically not trees, palms are also susceptible to improper pruning practices.

Palms do not require pruning to remain healthy or prevent storm damage and there is evidence they may be damaged more when a storm follows recent pruning of lower fronds.¹



Courtesy of Coconutcreek.net

Live, healthy fronds should not be removed except when necessary to provide clearance. Removing healthy fronds above the horizontal should be avoided.¹



¹ Gilman, E. F., Lilly, S., & International Society of Arboriculture. (2013). *Best management practices: Tree pruning (3rd ed.)*. Champaign, IL: International Society of Arboriculture. (pg. 39)



Questions?

Contact a Monroe County Biologist at (305) 289-2500 for additional information.