



YYC Trees: Common Pruning Questions

1. Is it too late to prune once a tree has started to bud?

When the buds have just started to swell and bud out it is the wrong time to prune. If you are taking out deadwood, then it is ok. Please wait for 2 – 3 weeks after the leaves are fully out before pruning to provide the greatest opportunity for the tree to be able to establish its new leaf material to help it photosynthesis. This will also help you determine what branches are dead causing the least amount of material to be removed from the tree (10-15% or less live material).

2. What should a pruner cleaning solution be made of?

You can make a cleaning solution with either isopropyl alcohol or with bleach. Use a mixture of 10% alcohol or bleach and 90% water. Make sure you are wiping down your shears or loppers in between each cut. If you don't then you take the chance of spreading the disease. When finished wipe and oil your pruners to prevent rust.

3. Should you cover a pruned area with wax or paint?

You should never cover a pruned area with any material as it can cause accelerated wood decay behind the covering and can create protected hiding places for pests that bore into the rotting wood. *These factors* prevent the tree from compartmentalizing the decay which can lead to further damage to the tree. A proper pruning cut stimulates the trees response to seal the area naturally.

4. Who should pay to prune branches coming from a neighbours property?

If there is a tree hanging over the property line always discuss with the owner of the tree (person who has the base of the tree trunk on their property) what the situation is, what you would like to do, who is going to perform the work, and who will pay for the work to be completed. Once an agreement has been reached make sure it is documented and signed by both parties.

5. I have a thin spruce tree. If I prune the top off of my tree will that help it to fill out or will that cause damage to the tree?

You should never to top any tree, especially coniferous trees (Spruce, Pine, Fir, Larch) this will not cause the tree to fill out. It will lead to more vertical trunks at the topping point that are typically poorly attached and prone to failure.

Additionally, there are several coniferous tree species within Calgary and people tend to call them all spruce trees. The 2 most common species of spruce trees within Calgary are the native white spruce or a Colorado blue spruce. The white spruce typically has a thinner canopy in comparison to the Colorado blue spruce. Both tree species would benefit and have the potential



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to have new growth sprout within the canopy if the fine deadwood is removed from the interior of the canopy, a 2-3 inch thick wood chip mulch is installed on the ground throughout the entire area covered by the tree canopy, and there is supplemental water added from half the diameter of the canopy outwards weekly.

6. There is tree adjacent to my house on city property that has a big dead branch on it. Can I prune it or should I contact the city?

All city trees must be pruned by city staff. Please go to <https://maps.calgary.ca/TreeSchedule/> and enter your address. You can then click on the tree with the dead branch and find the Tree ID number. Please [submit a 311](#) with the tree ID number or address and someone from Urban Forestry will be out to look at the tree.

7. Suckers seem to be pretty common. What causes them and are there any tips for helping keep suckers at bay?

Suckers at the base of a tree are typically a sign of the tree being under stress. Stress can be caused by many factors but the 3 most common are the tree was planted incorrectly, the roots haven't been able to break through the soil wall interfaces with the basket or tree planting hole, and a lack of water.

Improper planting – if the tree was planted in the last 6 months it may still be possible to replant correctly. Often trees are planted too deeply, please refer to proper planting guidelines.

Lack of water – (please simplify the content below, the target audience is a homeowner who won't have a deep root feeder and will have to use gravity.

Tips: Gently pull by hand or with a small shovel any soil adjacent to the tree trunk and try to find the root flare (point where the roots flare out from the trunk). If the root flare isn't at or near the ground surface gently remove soil until it is close to the ground surface. To break through the soil wall interfaces you can use either a small soil auger or a deep root watering probe. Try to determine the point where the different boundaries occur and bore on an downwards angle through them away from the trunk with the soil auger or place the deep root watering probe in the ground to a depth of 4-8 inches beside the barriers and let the water jets cut horizontally across the barriers. This should be repeated on 4 sides of the trees and then a month later stagger the holes to be between the original holes. Soil auguring should only need to be done once or twice while using the deep root watering probe can be done more frequently. Apply a layer of wood chip mulch 2-3 inches thick on the ground surface so that it extends to the dripline of the tree canopy to aid in improving the moisture in the soil.

Some tree species like to have multiple stems and will always grow suckers. Chokecherries are a great example, the best management strategy is to prune them regularly to reduce the amount of energy spent on them.



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8. Can you prune dead branches off at any time?

Yes, any dead, diseased or damaged branches can be removed at any time of the year. To check your branch to make sure that it is dead do the fingernail scratch on the branch. Scratch away a fingernail size part of the bark and look at the colour underneath, if it is green it is still alive but if there is no colour or a grey colour the branch is dead.

9. How much of my tree should I prune? Is there an amount I should keep in mind?

The main rule to remember is that less is more. You want to make sure you are not taking out more than 10 – 15% of live material from your tree. If there is more that needs to be removed then pruning should take place over a few years and not all at once.