



Pruning after Cicada Damage

Nancy Pollard, Horticulture Educator

Q. A lot of the branch tips on my trees and shrubs turned brown this summer. Is it possible the cicadas caused this?

A. The female cicada slit 1- and 2-year old wood in order to lay her eggs, which have long since hatched and dropped to the ground. Numerous slits resulted in the tips of some branches breaking off or wilting.

Q. I am not sure if I should prune it or not. How do I decide?

A. If you leave the dead twig attached, the branch will have a harder time sealing off or compartmentalizing the wound. If the plant can seal off the wound, later infection is unlikely. Check to see if is the twig dead. This is only practical on smaller trees and shrubs.

Q. How do I know if the twig is dead or alive?

A. An alive twig has green underneath the bark when cut or scratched. A dead twig does not.

Q. Where and what do I prune?

A. If the twig is dead, follow the twig down to an area that is alive. Cut (on a slant) about ¼ inch above an alive outward facing bud, or an alive outward facing twig or branch. (Figure 1) A new branch will grow next year from the remaining buds. (Figure 2) You direct the future growth of the tree by picking which bud locations are just below the cut.

Q. Why should the cut be above an outward facing bud?

A. Inward facing buds will grow towards the center of the tree and likely result in crossing branches that rub and wound each other. Pruning to an outward facing bud results in a more open, aesthetically pleasing tree, and rarely results in rubbing branches.

Q. Do I have to prune out all damage? What if a twig appears to be still alive, even though there are slit wounds?

A. Likely the twig will be able to seal off some small vertical wounds. Growth may be stunted this year, but the branch should recover if the damage was not severe. Check next year to see if the wounds are closing over. If the tissue appears healthy, the plant will likely recover. If the twig seems weak or is not recovering, prune it out.

Q. When and how much should I prune out?

A. It is easy to see the damage when there are still leaves on the trees. However for oaks, pruning is best done when it is cold so as not to increase the risk of oak wilt, a serious problem in Illinois. If possible, do not remove more than 20% of the plant when pruning. Shrubs and trees pruned excessively may respond with water sprouts and suckers. Note: Some municipalities require only certified arborists to prune trees in the parkway. Check your local ordinances before pruning parkway trees.

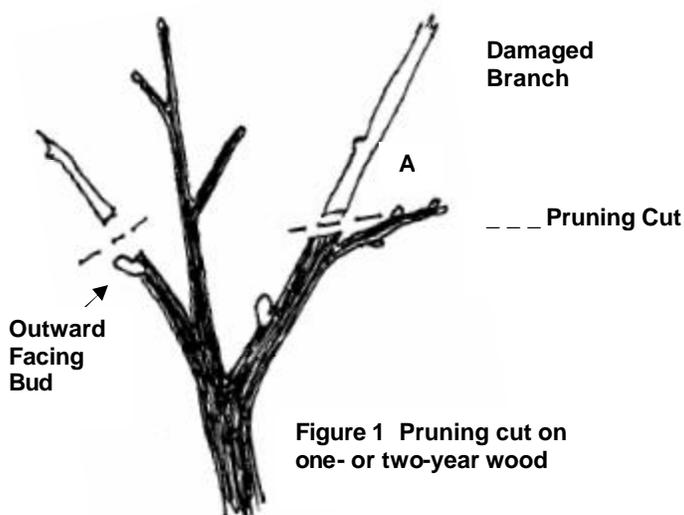


Figure 1 Pruning cut on one- or two-year wood

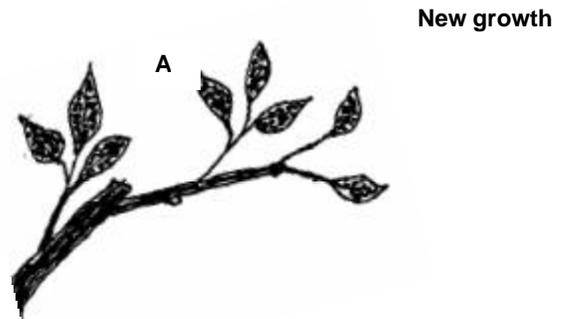


Figure 2 Right branch one year later