

USE PRUNINGS FOR MULCH

The best mulch for any plant is that plant's own plant tissue. Don't throw away your prunings; use them as beneficial moisture-conserving and soil-building mulch! First, make a pile of the small prunings and use your hand pruners to cut them up into two- to four-inch pieces. Put these fine prunings around the base of the tree, leaving a three- to six-inch ring clear around the trunk of the tree. That way if the mulch gets really wet after a lot of rain and stays wet there won't be any rot or fungus producing moisture against the trunk of the tree. The bigger branches that can't be cut with pruning shears can be used for crafts, fences, building or as kindling.

TOOLS TO USE

The tool of choice is primarily the hand pruning shears. Use shears with a curved blade that scissor. Hold the pruning shears properly so the cutting blade is on top of the incision and moves down with each cut. For larger cuts use a pruning saw which allows for a nice clean, close cut.

Avoid loppers! You can't get as close and clean of a cut as you get with a saw. Loppers risk a bad pruning stub which can die back and create an entryway for insects and disease.

Make sure your shears are sharp!

LEARN MORE

To watch a video on how to prune a native Velvet Mesquite tree, visit:
www.DesertHarvesters.org

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DESERT HARVESTERS is a volunteer-run, grassroots effort in Tucson, Arizona. We strive to promote, celebrate, and enhance, local food security and production by encouraging the planting of indigenous, food-bearing shade trees in water-harvesting earthworks, and then educating the public on how to harvest and process the bounty.

For more information about harvesting wild, cultivated, and native foods from the Sonoran Desert, visit: www.DesertHarvesters.org.

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THE DESERT CAN FEED YOU



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www.DesertHarvesters.org
Now go eat some desert.



PRUNING NATIVE SONORAN DESERT MULTI-TRUNK TREES

WHY PRUNE?

Trees in their natural form are just fine without pruning. You prune a tree because you want to be able to walk around or under it or you want the shade of a taller canopy.

WHEN TO PRUNE

Pruning is best done when trees are dormant. For most trees this is in the winter time. You can also prune in the fall or early spring.

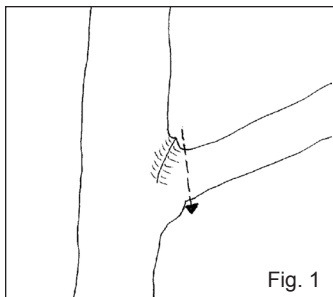
You can start pruning a tree after it is three years old. There are auxins in the tips of the branches that relate directly to root growth. If you prune too many of the branch tips in the early years of the tree's life it will slow root establishment. Quicker root establishment means the tree is less prone to blowing over in winds and can get by with less water sooner.

WORK FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Start from the bottom and prune up. Never top prune a tree. Top pruning a tree turns it into a damaged shrub.

MAKE A CLOSE CLEAN CUT

Start with small branches and hand pruning shears. Cut as close to the branch you want to keep as you can, keeping the branch collar (a raised section of bark on the underside of the branch) intact (Fig. 1). When you cut close to the branch you want to keep, all the energy that was going into the branch you cut will go up into the kept branch. If you cut far away and leave a stub you increase chances for disease,

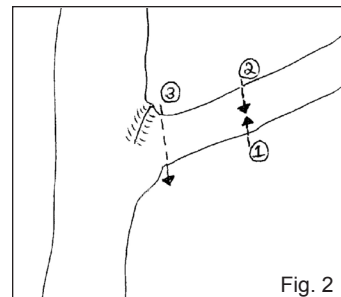


create a hazard that people can catch their eye or their clothing on, and create a bad branching effect. A branching effect is created because the energy goes into the stub but has nowhere to go so the tree makes lots of new spindly branches – creating more pruning work. Do it right the first time! Remove whole limbs or branches and do not leave a stub.

LEAVE MANY TRUNKS

The native trees in southern Arizona are often multi-trunk trees, and you want to maintain that natural form. Pruning into one trunk increases pruning maintenance and weakens the tree making it more susceptible to wind damage. Multi-trunk trees shade over more of the ground and reduce soil moisture loss to evaporation. They will also hold more of the leaf drop, the natural mulch, beneath them which will help build and improve the soil.

BIGGER BRANCHES – look for the furrow and branch collar. For branches thicker than 5/8 inch use a pruning saw and use the



three-cut method (Fig. 2). This will prevent the bark attached to the bottom of the cut branch from stripping away when it falls.

1. On the branch you are removing place your blade under the branch six inches away from the branch collar and cut up one-quarter of the way into the branch.
2. Place your saw on top of where you just cut and finish the cut by cutting down to remove the branch.
3. Cut off the stub by placing the blade close to the branch you are keeping. It should be next to the branch bark ridge (a raised furrow of bark where the branches intersect). Cut down so you end the cut above at the outside edge of the branch collar. This way the tree's tissue will grow around and heal the cut more easily.