

PROPER PRUNING PREVENTS PROBLEMS

By Ralph E. Mitchell

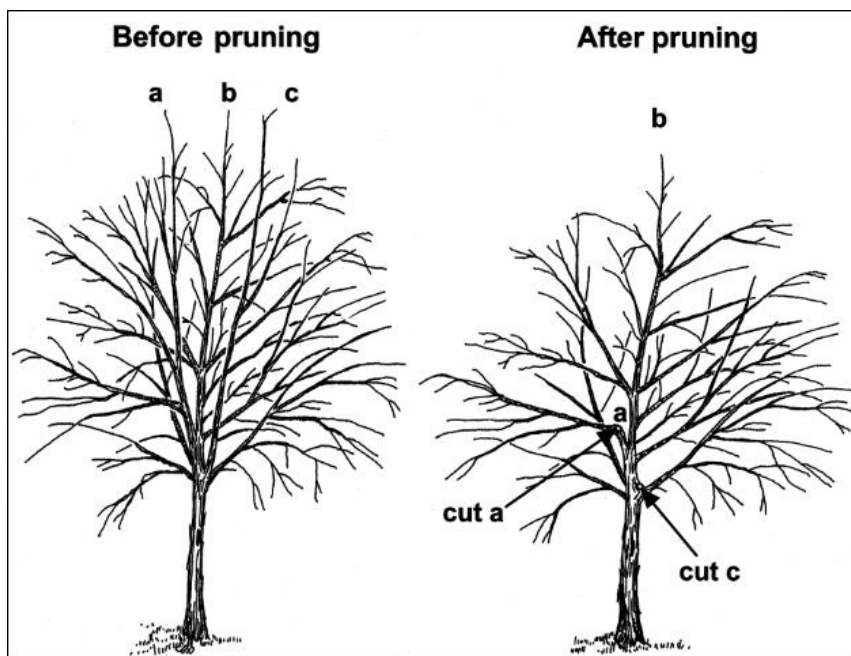
A tree that fails in a wind storm can cause damage to people and property. The residents of Charlotte County know this well and can certainly appreciate safe trees that are wind-tolerant, good looking and sustainable for many years. One study suggests that, in the face of a 120 mile per hour winds, properly pruned trees suffer less damage. From the time of planting, your tree should expect six to seven pruning events in the first 25 to 30 years of its life. Pruning to develop good structure will help our individual trees, and our urban forest as a whole, hold up better in our windy world.

Good tree structure starts early with a single trunk and properly spaced branches arrayed around the trunk like the spokes of a wheel. Trouble begins when trees grow what are called co-dominant stems. These are stems or trunks that grow from the same point and produce V-shaped connections. Bark (called included bark) is even pinched between the stems giving the appearance of a connection. However, the connection between these two stems is weak at best and there is really no physical bond. As the stems grow, they actually push each other apart and a crack may develop. A good wind storm comes along and, like a wishbone; one or both of these stems break off. Early correction of these co-dominant stems and encouragement of U-shaped branch

connections with good structural attachments will eliminate this problem.

In addition to branch structural problems, a tree's canopy can become unbalanced either where one side is actually heavier than another side, or when the overall weight of the canopy is at the tips of the branches. This can happen from improper pruning practices that remove foliage on the lower and interior parts of the tree. More growth occurs at the tips of the tree making it taller and wider. Often called lion-tailed trees due to the branches resembling a long bare tail with a tuft at the end, these trees have all of the leaves growing at the tips of the branches which easily break in wind storms. In addition, after this improper pruning practice occurs, many new sprouts develop with poor connections to the branch.

One additional common pruning mistake is the late removal of large branches. On shade trees, the lowest permanent branch should be about 15 to 20 feet off the ground. This allows for good clearance underneath for both people and, if near a street, enough room for cars. The problem develops when these lower branches are removed well past their appropriate time. It is one thing to remove a small branch and expect the wound to seal fully. However, large pruning cuts leave large wounds that take some time to seal up and



are accordingly, open to decay that can eventually work its way into the center of the tree ultimately compromising its structural integrity.

These are just a few of the pruning issues that may be encountered in your landscape related to hurricane recovery and preventive pruning ideas. For more information on this specific topic, check out:

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/EP/EP31500.pdf>,
Developing a Preventative Pruning Program: Young Trees, the source for this article.

You can also learn more about the nuts and bolts of pruning by checking out our EDIS publication called:

Pruning Landscape Trees and Shrubs
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/MG087>.

For relatively small, newly planted trees, the gardener should be able to take care of many of these pruning chores as the tree grows. For large trees that are potentially dangerous to work on due to their size, our office would recommend the services of a **Florida Certified Arborist**. Florida Certified Arborists are educated about tree care and keep up on the latest information. Check out the Florida Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture at www.floridaisa.org. This website will help you find a Florida Certified Arborist and other helpful tree information. As with any person you hire, make sure that they have insurance and references.

For more information on all types of tree-related subject matter, please contact our Master Gardeners on the Plant Lifeline at 941.764.4340 from 1:00pm-4:00pm Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Our office is located at 25550 Harbor View Road, Suite 3, in Port Charlotte. Our **Plant Clinics** are available across the county:

- **Demonstration Garden (6900 Florida Street, PG)** Thursdays 9:00am-11:00am.
- **Englewood/Charlotte Public Library** Thursdays 10:00am-1:00pm.
- **Mid-County Regional Library** 1st and 3rd Thursday of month 1:00pm-3:00pm.
- **Edison College Learning Resources Library** 3rd Tuesday of month 1:00pm-4:00pm.
- **South Gulf Cove Learning Garden** 3rd Wednesday of month 9:00am-12:00pm.

Monthly **Plant Clinics** are Saturdays 9:00am-12:00pm at the following locations:

- **Peachland Promenades Publix** 2nd Saturday of month.
- **Home Depot Murdock & Home Depot Punta Gorda** 3rd Saturday of month.
- **Lowe's Garden Center Murdock** 4th Saturday of month.

Ralph Mitchell is the County Extension Director/Horticulture Agent for the Charlotte County Cooperative Extension Service. You may contact him by email (Ralph.Mitchell@charlottefl.com). You may also contact a volunteer Master Gardener 1:00pm-4:00pm Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 941.764.4340 or by email (Master.Gardener@charlottefl.com).

For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Steele, at 941.764.4340. Allison can help educate you about the Florida Yards & Neighborhoods Program so that you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

Resource:

Gilman, E.F. & Bisson, A. (2007) Developing A Preventative Pruning Program: Young Trees. University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service.