



LAMMSCAPES!

“Yes, you can prune too!” Pruning Suckers & Rubbing Branches

Here we are restoring two multi-stem shrubs, a magnolia and a Japanese tree lilac, which have gone unpruned for several years. These general pruning techniques are applicable for any of your trees or larger, tree-like shrubs. We like to do pruning in early spring before tree leaves obscure our view of branch structure, but this type of pruning may be done any time of year.

1. **Start at the bottom.** Look for **suckers**, which are small shoots growing from the base alongside the trunk. Suckers need to be removed before they get big enough to start diverting energy from the growth of the main trunk. Cut them off with a sharp pruners or saw.



2. Now we can clearly see the base of the magnolia, sucker-free.



3. Now we can examine the **structure of the larger stems** as they grow from the ground and start to branch. We want these stems to be healthy and uniformly spaced so they can form a nice crown to the tree. Look especially for large stems that are **crossing or rubbing**, like the two on the left.

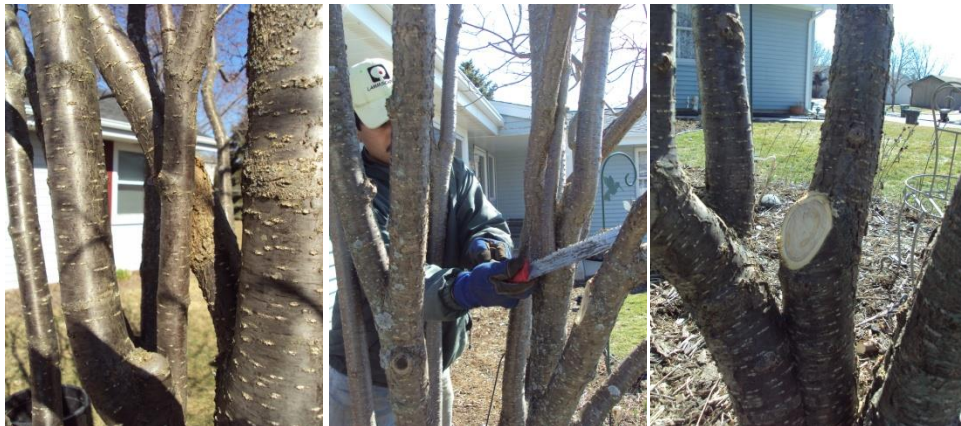


This creates wounds which are good entry points for insects and disease.

4. **Decide which stems to retain at the bottom** by looking at how they progress further up the tree. Often, a branch crossing or rubbing near the bottom is also causing similar problems further up. Imagine the gap you will leave in the canopy when you cut out your ‘culprit’ branch, but don’t be afraid if there is a space for now - the ‘culprit’ will only cause worse problems in the future! Here, we decided to cut off the smaller of the rubbing magnolia stems.



5. Now that we addressed crossing branches at the bottom of the tree, we continue to look for similar problems further into the crown. Here is an area of the lilac with multiple small crossing branches. We removed two of these, opening the area up so the remaining branches can grow healthily! Be sure to **cut these branches off flush with the trunk** so the wound can heal over well - **no stubs** left over on the main trunk.



6. We have now established a **nice structure to the bottom of the tree** - no crossing or rubbing branches, and the remaining stems are more uniformly spaced and have room to grow.





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**“Yes, you can!”
Pruning the canopy of trees & shrubs**

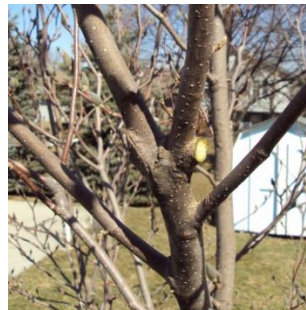
7. Now we will do the detail work in the canopy. Use a good ladder! This magnolia has some **dead stubs** (like the one in the center of this picture) left over from poor previous pruning. Cut off the stubs, again flush with the trunk at an angle.



8. The last step is to **thin the canopy**. We want canopy that is uniform and open, to allow good air circulation. **Find any overcrowded areas** where there are many branches emerging close together, and choose some of the smaller ones to remove. Use your previous experience: look for crossing or rubbing branches, and also those which are growing towards the inside of the tree. We want to **encourage branches which are growing outward and upward**, and not towards the center of the tree where they are likely to run into other branches. However, don't get too prune-happy with **flowering species** such as this magnolia (or crabapples, for instance) because the little branches carry the flower buds. Here, we have before and after pictures of some thinning cuts, eliminating some minor growth to let larger branches grow strong!



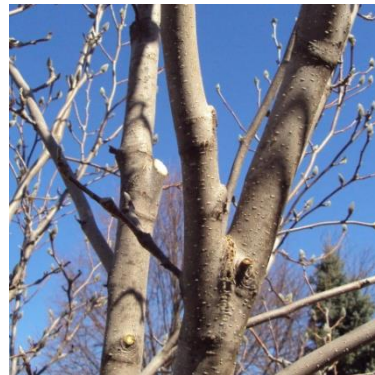
Before, cuts shown in red →



After



Before, cuts shown in red →



After

9. Here we are! Bottoms up, your shrub or small tree will be
~ **clean around the bottom** - you pruned off the suckers!
~ **spreading open in the middle** - you pruned out crossing/rubbing stems!
~ **open in the canopy** - you pruned out minor branches in crowded areas!

The best part of pruning is admiring your renovated tree or shrub!

We pruned this unkempt magnolia...



into this shapely magnolia!



And look at your nicely pruned Japanese tree lilac! Remember the original tree we started with?



Great job! 😊



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