

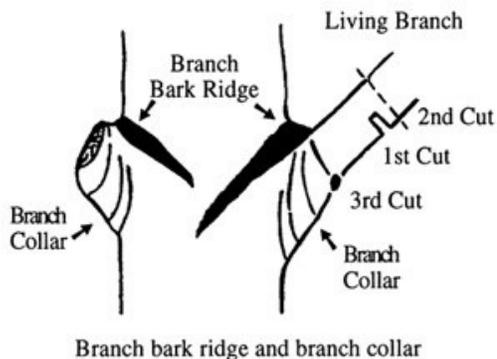


Food for thought: Three basics of Fruit Tree Pruning

Unlike shade trees, fruit trees require pruning during the first three years they are in the ground to ensure strong architecture that can handle the weight of fruit production. Among the most fundamental pruning lessons are how to make a collar cut, how to identify and address included bark, and how radial branch spacing can improve fruit ripening and prevent disease.

The Collar Cut

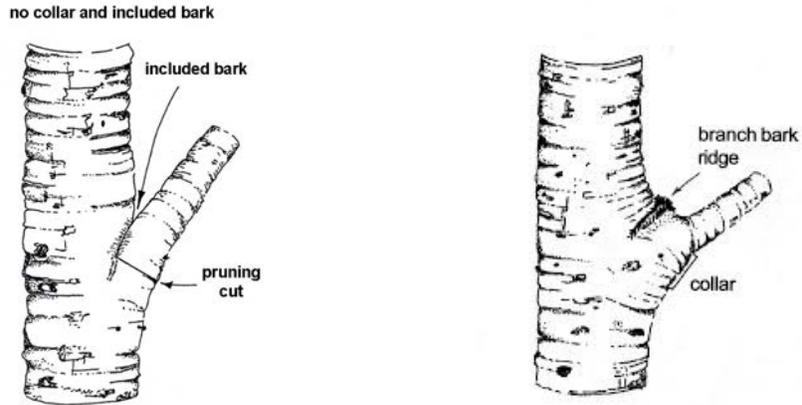
Trees don't heal, they seal themselves off or "compartmentalize" at what's called the branch collar. When a clean pruning cut is made just outside of the branch collar, hormones are triggered to close the wound and form what resembles a doughnut, as in the photo below at right. When those cuts are small enough, trees are able to seal themselves off completely over time. When a jagged cut is made or when the branch collar is damaged, decay or rapid re-growth at or near the site of the damage is more likely to occur.



Pruning and Included Bark

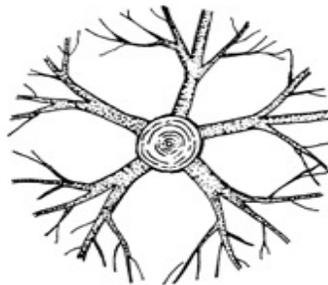
Strong architecture is arguably more important with fruit trees than it is for shade trees due to the significant amount of weight fruit add. **The second most important thing to know about fruit tree pruning is that included bark – the result of too acute an angle between the trunk and a side or "lateral" branch – should be removed.** That is where branches most often fail when stressed by the weight of fruit, so be sure to remove included bark before your trees

begin to produce a crop. Instead, choose branches that are upright at 45-60-degrees relative to the trunk. The formation of a “branch bark ridge” indicates strong branch attachment and therefore good architecture on your fruit tree(s).



Radial Branch Spacing

Fruit needs both sun to ripen and air circulation to prevent fungal disease. **The third most important thing to know about fruit tree pruning is that an excellent way to facilitate both is to radially space branches around the trunk of the tree.** Ideally, space the branches vertically 8 – 12” apart. An added benefit of radial branch spacing is that it also makes harvesting easier by providing space for a ladder if needed. Here is the idea of how to envision your tree as viewed from above:



This fruit tree stewardship information thoughtfully sponsored by our friends at Two Towns Ciderhouse.

