

Fall Pruning Techniques

Now is the time to start making a list of trees in your collection that need a proper fall pruning. Typically, these techniques are used to not only to set buds up for next year's push but also to improve the image of your tree's winter silhouette. The best example of these practices can be seen on deciduous bonsai specimens as this is the best time to be able to see what has been happening underneath the lush canopy throughout the growing seasons. The signal to begin work is when fall color has just begun and the first leaves begin to fall.

Evergreens and conifers can be fall pruned as well but it takes a little more observation to know when to begin work. Having a mix of deciduous and evergreen trees in your collection can help you make this assessment easier. If you care to only have evergreens and conifers in your collection then the signal is usually when your trees begin to harden off the late fall flush, which is common most years in southeastern Louisiana due to unpredictable weather.

As stated before, the purpose of fall pruning is to set buds for next spring. Keep in mind that this is not a time for the concave cutters but instead a time for thinning shears. It is best to hold off from larger branch cuts or branch removal until the early spring so that your trees have more of a chance to react to the damage sooner. Pruning too heavily could result in bleeding out on some species and in most cases leaves a large open wound that will retain too much moisture and attract bugs and disease throughout dormancy.

This is also a good time to wire out trees that would otherwise be difficult to style, example: bald cypress. Bare branches on deciduous trees are easier to wire and ensure that valuable buds are not crushed or blocked from extending. For evergreen or conifers, a light thinning of interior growth can be removed at this time to make wire application easier as well.

Since we are not removing larger branching at this time, we should instead be more worried about building taper and bifurcation on finer branching. Consider the length between internodes before each cut and make a consideration of where the branching you are working on occurs on the tree. I have the tendency to leave more internodes on the lower branches of my trees. This encourages these branches to bud back with more strength. The higher up I trim, the further back I trim to the next set of buds on those upper branches. This process will showcase that the lower branches are the oldest part of the tree. The lower branches should be longer and have more elongated sections. Whereas the higher parts of the crown of the tree should be denser as they are closer to the sun light.

I usually wire as I trim and then once I have traced my way through the entire tree I step back to see if any further adjustments need to be made. This is the time to pull out the small finer wire to point buds up slightly on the ends of each "cloud" or pad as you form them. Although this is dependent on the style you are going for with each individual tree, it is still a good practice. It sounds silly but pointing the growing tips up towards the sun light will make them grow stronger when they open in the spring.

-Evan Pardue.