Proper Tree pruning

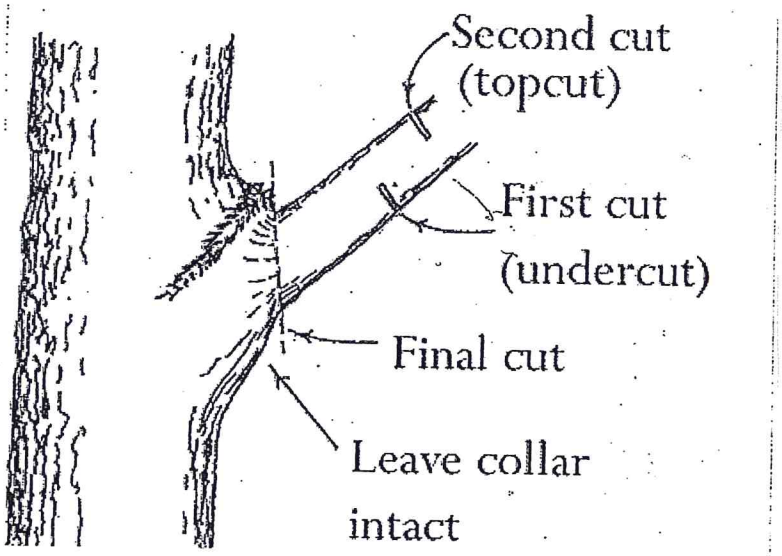
Tree pruning is required to be performed to industry standards which are American National Standards called ANSI 300 Part 1: Tree, Shrub and Other Woody Plant Maintenance Standard Practices (pruning). One of the pruning standards are when cutting a branch you use the 3 cut method. See Drawing 1.

The three cut method to removing a branch or limb.

Step 1
Make an undercut about 12 inches
From the trunk.

Step 2
Make a top cut farther out
To remove the limb.

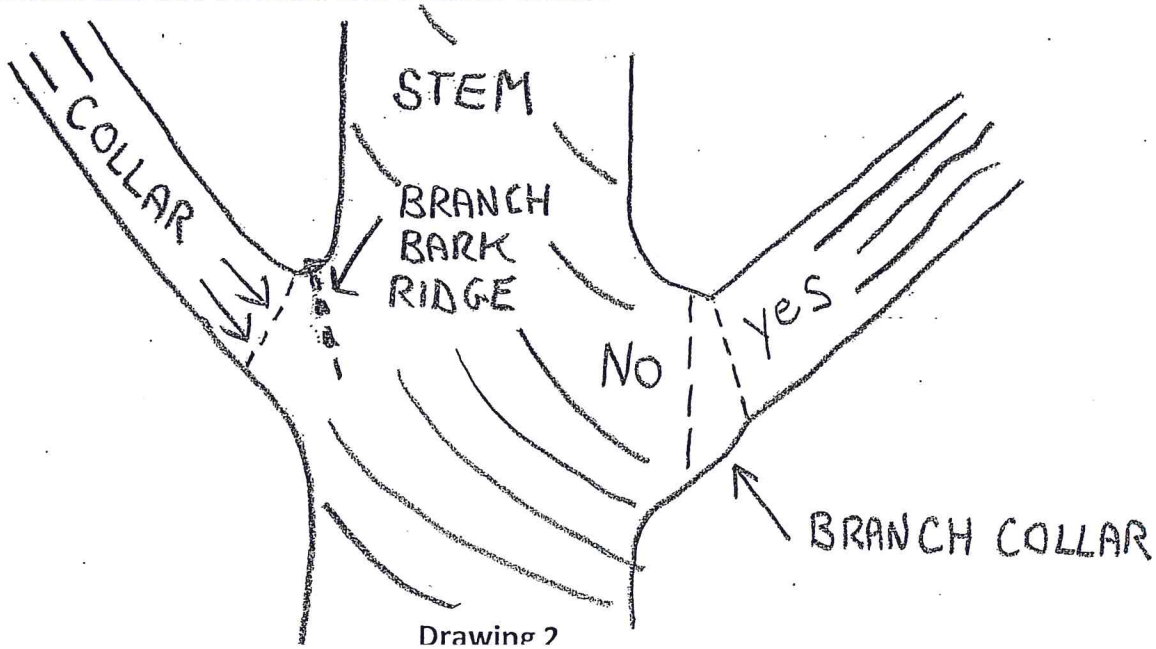
Step 3
Remove the stub with final
Cut, being careful not to cut
Flush against the trunk.
Leave the collar intact.



Drawing 1

The last cut you make to remove a branch is outside the tree branch collar. What is a branch collar? It is a bulbous area that is attached to the trunk or a bigger branch. This bulbous area or branch collar is collar tissue that is rich in energy reserves and chemicals that hinder tree decay and helps the tree create wound wood that seals up the wound. See Drawing 2.

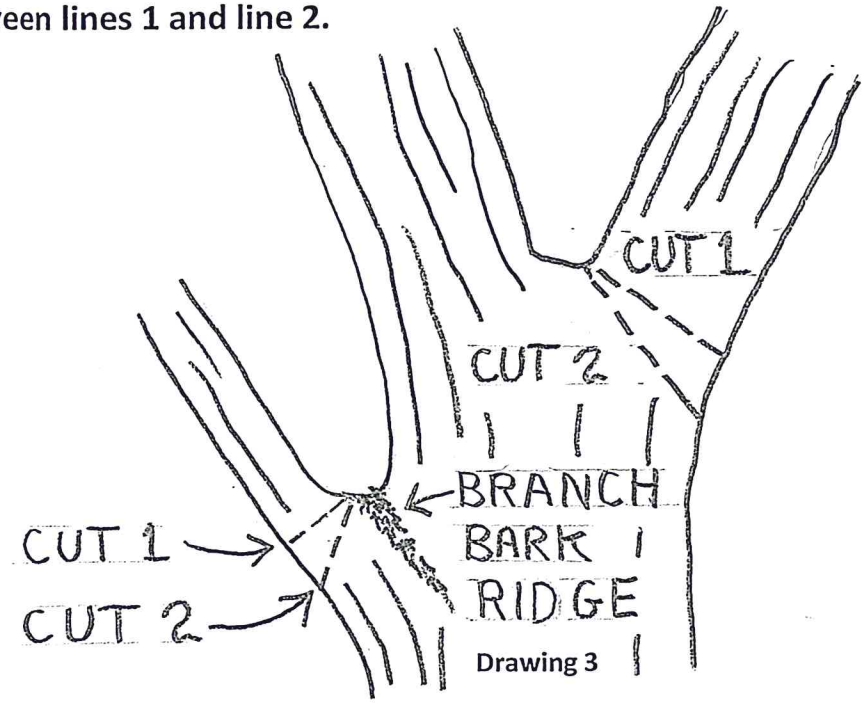
Branch Collar is a swollen area at the base of the branch where it joins the trunk. Make the cut outside the branch collar.



Drawing 2

You do not want to cut into the branch collar. Always make a cut outside the branch collar. The branch collar may be formed at an angle. You would not cut straight down or you may be cutting into the branch collar. Follow the angle of the branch collar. Sometimes the branch collar is not visible or there is no branch collar. The cut would then be outside the branch bark ridge and be a small stub cut. Make the cut that creates the smallest pruning wound. See Drawing 3.

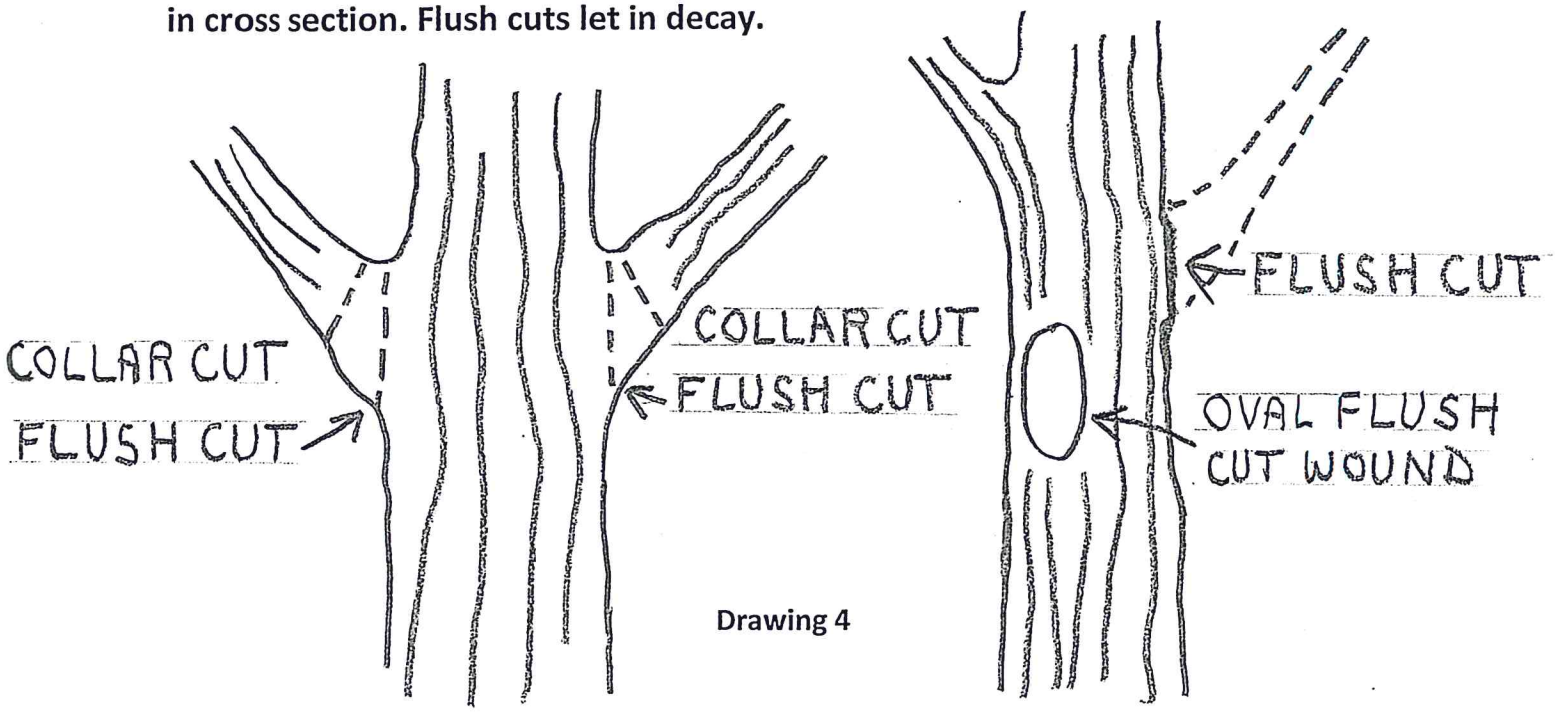
Branch removal cut with no visible collar, the final removal cut would be between lines 1 and line 2.



Drawing 3

Flush cuts are when you cut too close to the trunk and that cuts into the branch collar. Flush cuts damage the tree where the collar was removed and opens the tree up to rot and decay. Flush cuts are improper pruning and are prohibited. See Drawing 4.

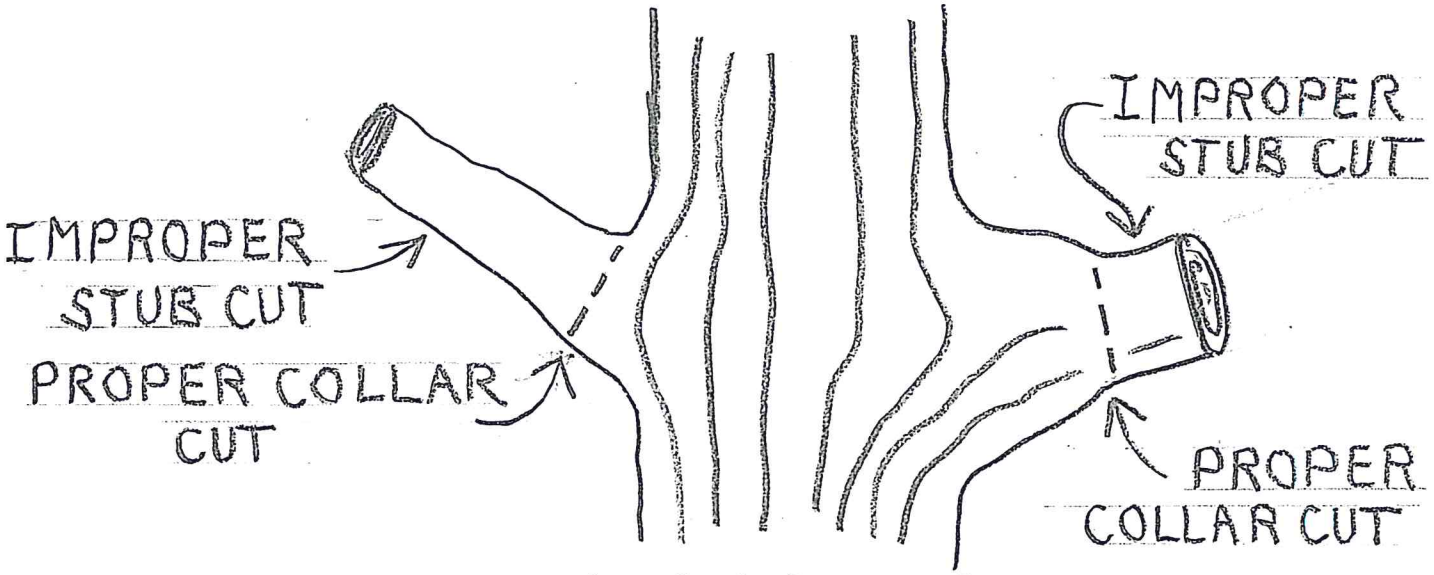
Flush Cut removes the swollen branch base or collar. Flush cuts tend to be oval in cross section. Flush cuts let in decay.



Drawing 4

Stubs cuts are when too much of the branch is left past the branch collar. The piece of branch just rots and decays and can form a hazard. The tree is unable to seal up this wound. Stub cuts are improper pruning and are prohibited. See Drawing 5.

Stub cuts are when a small or large portion of the branch remains. Trees have a difficult time compartmentalizing this wound.



Palms in Safety Harbor

What is a palm tree? Although we commonly refer to them as palm trees, they are actually not trees at all. Palms have more in common with grass or bamboo than they do with trees. Palms do not have wood, but are composed of long fibrous strands which have the strength to support the canopy while allowing palms to bend in high winds. Palms grow mostly in warm tropical to sub-tropical climates around the world and many cultures depend heavily on the food and products they provide. In our area few palms are actually native. The large native palms are the Cabbage (Sabal) Palm, Royal Palm and Everglades Palm. Most palms planted are exotics and planted for a tropical look. Palms have their place in the landscape since they grow in shade or sun and take up a smaller landscape space than trees. It is important we understand the health and maintenance needs of palms.

Palm Fertilization

With the exception of the native sabal palm, the majority of palms used in the landscape are exotic species brought in from South Florida. In our area almost all palm species suffer nutritional deficiencies, particularly, the macronutrients, potassium and magnesium. In some cases micronutrients deficiencies can have a profound effect on palm health. Nutrient deficiencies can lead to the decline in palm health. An unhealthy palm is susceptible to deadly diseases and insects. To keep a palm healthy and green it is imperative to provide the right balanced fertilizer. Research scientists at the University of Florida have conducted extensive research on nutrition needs of landscape palms and have devised an 8-0-12 formula for palms. Another fertilizer that has the formula 0-0-16 can be applied in the summer to correct palm deficiencies. Other fertilizers high in nitrogen like turf fertilizers have been found to damage palm trees so keep them away from palm roots.

Why prune a palm?

For aesthetics, safety and clearance for buildings and electrical lines.

What can be pruned?

Seed pods, dead and dying palm fronds can be removed. It is not recommended to remove any green fronds. Removing green fronds deprives the palm of needed food and minerals which makes the palm vulnerable to disease and nutrient deficiencies.

The City of Safety Harbor has a palm pruning ordinance which states: "no palm frond shall be removed from a palm that emanates from the trunk at or above a 90 degree angle that is perpendicular to the trunk unless palm frond is dead or severely chlorotic." This is called a 9 to 3 cut. Which represents if you draw horizontal a line from 9:00am to 3:00pm on a watch. Below the line is where pruning is allowed.

Removing the discolored fronds can sometimes spread nutritional deficiencies to other fronds on the tree. Best to just prune dead fronds.

Some palm diseases are spread by pruning saws. Sterilize your saw if going from sick looking palm to healthy palm.

Myth: hurricane pruning makes the tree stronger in high winds.

Fact: hurricane pruning causes more damage to palms during hurricane force winds. Older fronds protect the tender new leaves from damage. Remove only the dead palm fronds.

Great websites for tree pruning information:

www.treesaregood.com great tree pruning information and tree owner info.

Search web for: hort.ifas.ufl.edu/woody/pruning or pruning ed gilman then go to Pruning-Landscape Plants-Edward F. Gilman-UF/IFAS This website has great information on tree, palm and crape myrtle pruning