

Pruning and Thinning on Your Property

What to cut and what to leave? Dwell on this question too long and it's easy to give up and let Mother Nature deal with these issues on your acreage. But that's not the best approach.

Many times in past issues of the *Saddlewood Gazette* we've explained why it's important to prune and thin. It's essential for a healthy forest. We'll use this space to explain the How-To.

Pruning: Professional foresters from the Colorado State Forestry Service, the local Fire Department and fire mitigation consultants recommend trimming lower branches of our larger trees to 10' from the ground. Use this as a *guideline* and keep the overall size of the tree in mind when pruning away lower branches.

An easy place to start with your pruning is to remove as many of the dead limbs as you can safely reach. Next remove damaged or unhealthy limbs. Then begin to take those lower live branches that are close enough to the ground so as to provide a fast-moving grass fire a route directly up and into the trees.

Just taking these steps could keep you busy for quite a while. As you gather these limbs into a pile to be chipped pick up any excess dead wood lying on the ground. It's fuel for wildfires.

Cut limbs close to the trunk of the tree and don't leave stubs behind. If you look carefully where the limb joins the trunk, you'll see a thickening called the "branch collar". Cut as close to that as you can without wounding it. There's no need to seal each cut. The tree will seal itself and be healthier for it.

The best time to prune our Ponderosa Pine is before June. The trees need three to four weeks to seal and heal before the Pine Beetles begin to fly. The beetles are attracted to fresh wounds. This is also why it's a good idea to remove freshly cut or fallen limbs from the bases of live, healthy trees as soon as possible.

Thinning: Saddlewood is filled with overcrowded and weedy saplings. Most of these should be removed so that there's plenty of space between trees. If you like, start by removing some trees and then waiting a year or two before thinning again.

Examine the trees and flag the ones you want to keep. Thin out all the others. Look for straight trees with a single top or "leader" and healthy, normal looking branches. Thin out weak trees with unsightly growth or those with signs of insect or mechanical damage.