



Book Review

Pleninger, A.G., and C.J. Luley. 2012. *The ABCs Field Guide to Young and Small Tree Pruning. Visual Identification Series*. Urban Forestry, LLC., Naples, New York, U.S. 84 pp. ISBN: 978-0-9767129-2-3

Intended for a broad audience ranging from trained professionals to beginners, this guide is an informative, enlightening, and practical resource. Composed by two well-known authorities in the field of urban tree management, the guidelines and recommendations published in *The ABCs Field Guide to Young and Small Tree Pruning* offer tremendous application to help prevent the eventual challenges associated with the somewhat grim reality that most young trees established in communities never receive proper pruning.

Laid out in a user-friendly manner, this guide quickly sets the tone in the Preface, establishing this as a resource that enables individuals, regardless of their background, to correctly prune a tree using proper tools based on their “observation of the tree” in front of them, as one looks to “improve the health and structure of that particular tree.” This is in contrast with the common notion that one should prune in accordance with what they imagine a tree should look like, or that they should always prune in strict adherence to a set of idealized pruning protocols.

Following this, the guide is divided into four sections that follow the ABC(&D) theme:

Section A (About This Guide) briefly introduces and defines the concepts of “ABC” pruning. As part of the introduction, learning objectives are described and the reader is introduced to the systematic way in which the guide is composed. This is then reinforced by a pictorial flowchart that highlights each of the book’s sections and key points.

Section B (Bring Your Tools) identifies and outlines common pruning tools and their proper application, as well as the various pruning cuts

applied in the practice of pruning. Rather than locating specialized terminology pertinent to proper tree pruning in sometimes less-than-accessible appendices, the authors explain key terms like *scaffold branching*, *live branch area*, and *codominant stems*, early in the section. Each page follows a similar, user-friendly, linear approach consisting of an introduction, followed by the objective and application. The two main types of pruning cuts (i.e., removal cuts and reduction/heading cuts) are discussed in detail along with many scenarios that one encounters while performing real-world pruning, including pruning conifer branches versus those on deciduous trees, and pruning branches that occur without the presence of a branch bark ridge. This section wraps up by reiterating the importance of using proper cuts, including the application of the standard Three-Step-Cut Method.

Section C (Start Pruning—The ABC Method) immediately ties together the amount of pruning (i.e., the pruning “dose”) to the health of the tree, identifying for readers the importance of considering the age and well-being of a tree, relative to its response to being pruned. Specifically, dose is defined as the “percentage of live-crown removed during a pruning event” and that it may be “monitored closely by piling the branches” next to the tree as the pruning takes place for a reference point relative to the amount of plant material being removed. The book also cautions that overpruning is a common occurrence.

In keeping with its theme, this section of the book classifies tree form as being either a tree that is to be pruned with the idea of maintaining a single upright stem (form “A”) or as a tree to be pruned with the idea that the main stem will terminate into laterally growing branches (form “B”). The book then follows with many excellent photos and discussions advocating and detailing a pruning plan in accordance with these two

basic tree structures in mind. A-form trees are identified as comprising the majority of trees that are typically being pruned. Specific management of bad branches and attachments, codominant stems, competing laterals, and poor branch spacing (including vertical and horizontal spacing) follow. The guide defines *bad branches* to be dead, diseased, or structurally defective, including stubs and *bad attachments*, as being those with an acutely angled V-crotch attachment. This section—the largest of the book—closes with the identification and management of crossing branches.

Section D (Other Important Pruning Tips) identifies and discusses many important topics ancillary to pruning, including the seasonal timing of the cut, pruning intervals, and a discussion regarding the use of wound dressings. This section also captures the “don’ts of tree pruning,” and provides many high-quality photos that depict overpruning, improper pruning cuts, and other pruning faux pas. Of true interest in this portion of the book is the authors’ emphasis on using the timing of pruning as a variable that may be employed by the pruner to obtain specific objective’s, like encouraging flowering, fostering wound closure, or enhancing fruit size. Winter, of course, is stressed as being the ideal season in which to prune, as branching structure may be especially apparent during this leaf-off season.

The final section of the book (Extras) offers many excellent “before and after” pictures that depict what typical pruning scenarios of commonly planted urban trees will avail, if carried out correctly. These photos not only benefit practitioners but will no doubt help beginners to quickly see what a proper pruning job may look like. Discussion is also given to the height (or clearance) of the lowest branch—an important topic in today’s busy, well-travelled urban environment in which most of the populace lives.

In summary, this guide represents a key step in addressing an important need associated the proper pruning of young and small trees in the urban environment. It is filled with high-quality photography and helpful captions, depicting pruning scenarios, pruning challenges, and pruning strategies and tools. Worthy of further note is the fact that in addition to research findings, the authors also identify their personal, experientially based recommendations in this guide. They also

take the opportunity to encourage best management practices, like the use of specific pruning disinfectants, and reiterate the need to prevent against overpruning trees. *The ABCs Field Guide to Young and Small Tree Pruning* is user friendly and successfully takes a topic that can be complex or even intimidating and makes it straightforward for both homeowner and practitioner alike.

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