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Pruning Pines

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Pruning Pines

**Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
U. S. Department of Agriculture**

Pruning Pines

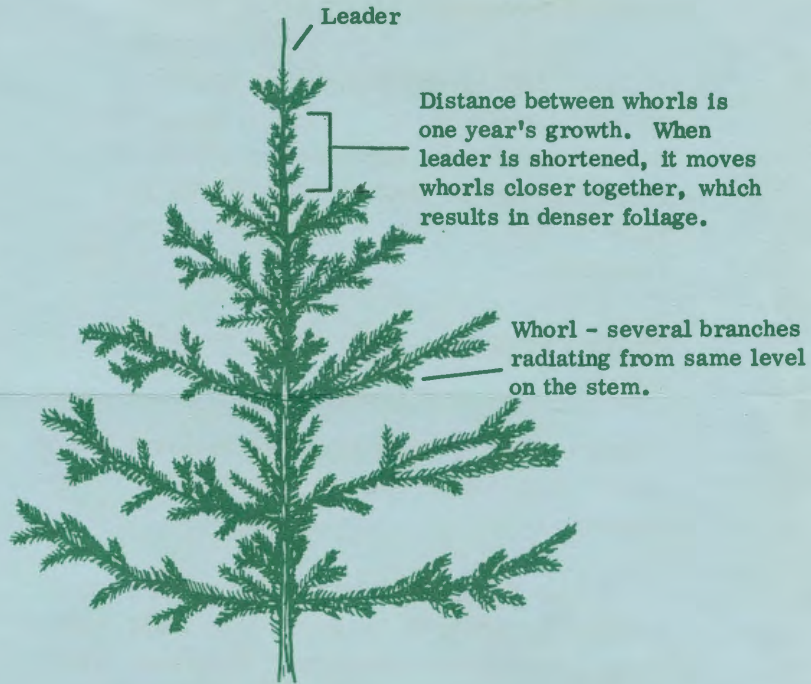
Larry Helwig, Extension forester

Your evergreens will keep on growing, whether or not you are nervy enough to attack them with a pruning knife. But while you're hesitating, they may be growing out of their space and losing their ornamental value.

Every evergreen needs attention from you every year, and by careful trimming you can can strengthen it and make it useful longer.

But you must use the right pruning procedures for the evergreen you're shaping. Evergreens are grouped according to their growth patterns, and each group requires slightly different pruning techniques.

This fact sheet covers pruning of the pines. Companion fact sheets treat the spruces and firs and the junipers, arborvitae and yews. With any evergreen, begin pruning when it is young.



Everybody knows a pine. . .

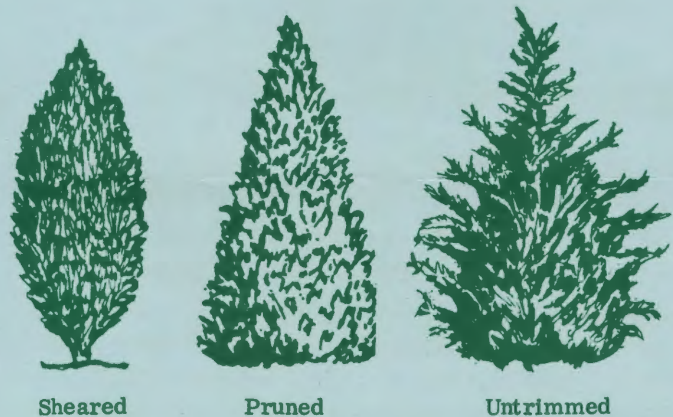
Pines bear needles in bundles of two and/or three. That's all you need to know.



A formal or a natural pine?

A sheared pine is one on which you cut off all growing tips regularly. The plant has a formal, tight appearance. Mugs are regularly trimmed in this fashion.

A pruned pine is selectively snipped; some individual branches or branchlets are removed periodically. The tree has a more feathery, natural look than a sheared one.



A constantly sheared evergreen will develop a tight 1- to 2-inch crust of green growth outside of a central core of brown but living branches. All tips that you snip off will be visible. If the shell of green is damaged, it takes a longer time for green foliage to cover the damaged area.

An evergreen which is only pruned will be more open and will have green foliage from the trunk to the outside branch tips. The pruned tips will be hidden by other branches.

Check any evergreen every year for pruning possibilities. Timing is particularly important for the pines. Prune or shear during the last of June to the first week in July. This is when new growth is expanding.

June						
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

July						
			1	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

Shaping Austrian, ponderosa, or Scotch pines

Start shaping when the tree is about 3 feet tall. Stay within the current year's growth.

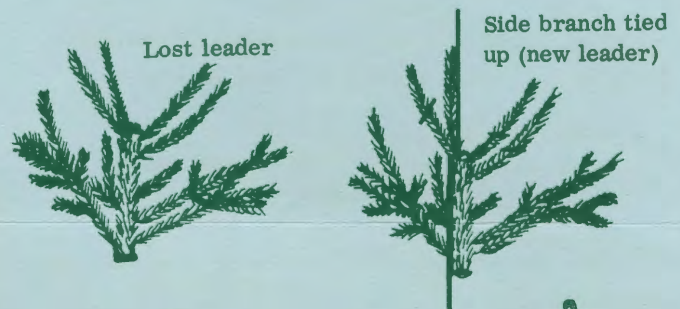
Limit the growth of the top candle (or leader) by about 12 inches. New buds will form and another whorl will develop. Then reduce the side shoots to balance the tree and to keep new leaders from developing.

Avoid cutting any needles in your shears. If you cut them, they will turn brown and be bobtailed for several years.

If the pine has a broken top . . .

An evergreen may lose its top from wind, winter, insect or other injury. Simply select the largest lateral of the nearest whorl and gently bend it up and tie to an attached brace. Use cloth ties (old nylons are dark and elastic). Wire fasteners may girdle and kill the growing branch. Cut back the other lateral branches by about half so that they do not compete with the shoot you have selected.

If the tree's top was broken for some time before you get to it, you may have a double or even a multiple leader developing. Remove the leaders farthest from the central axis.

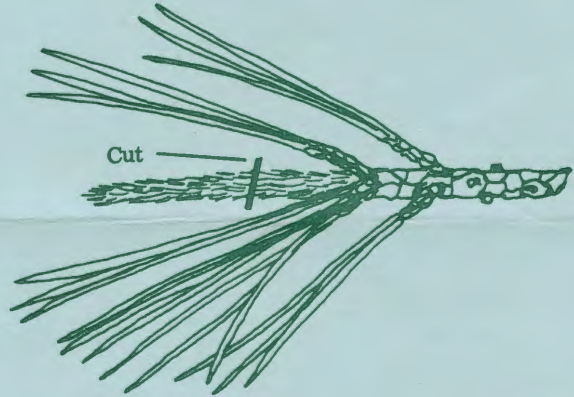


Mugo pines

Mugos are usually selected for their formal or restrained appearance. Consequently, you have to shear, every year. Otherwise they will lose their cushiony dwarf effect.

Trim in the current year's growth only.

If the mugo is older and neglected, however, it will be necessary to prune into the older growth, and the plant will look victimized for several years. Your other alternatives are to either cut out some of the main stems at the base and accept a clump-like tree in that spot, or cut it down and start with another plant. You might want to consider the dwarf species in this case.



If too tall, trim to get clump-like tree, if there's room. Otherwise, cut it down.



4-5 feet high before pruning

Neglected mugo



2-3 feet high after pruning
Individual branches

Catching up in pruning the neglected mugo

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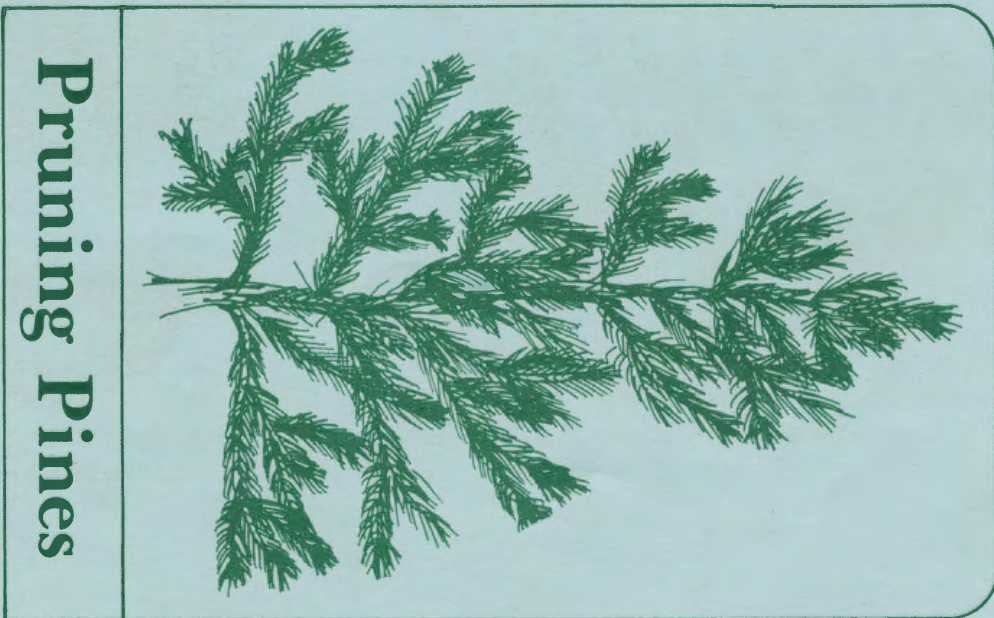
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