ARBORISTS — GUIDE

Pruning best practices for a written work plan

Use a clear pruning objective, an ANSI A300 based scope and local timing advice.

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Ask what problem pruning will solve before you agree to cuts. Clearance, structure and removal of damaged branches are different objectives. Mark the tree and the affected area in the written scope.

What ANSI A300 does

TCIA describes ANSI A300 as standard practices and specification writing guidelines for tree care. Its public summary says the standards help develop work specifications. They are not a complete specification by themselves. Ask the contractor to turn the objective into a site-specific scope based on the applicable standard. This guide uses TCIA's public summary; it does not reproduce the paid standard. TCIA, ANSI A300 Tree Care Standards, fetched 2026-11-10.

A quote that only says “prune to A300” leaves questions open. Ask which branches or areas are covered, why they need work, how access will be managed and what the company will leave in place. Ask for an agreed limit on work rather than a vague promise to “thin heavily”.

Preserve the branch collar

University of Minnesota Extension explains that cuts should preserve the branch collar. It warns against leaving a stub. It also describes staged cuts to prevent bark tearing when removing larger branches. Use this guidance to discuss the proposed result with the arborist. It is not an instruction to attempt overhead cutting yourself. University of Minnesota Extension, Pruning trees and shrubs, fetched 2026-11-10.

Ask whether the proposal removes dead wood, addresses a defect or creates clearance. Request an explanation if the contractor proposes cutting across the crown without a clear branch-based plan. ISA's pruning resources include a separate guide on why topping hurts trees. ISA, Pruning Your Trees, fetched 2026-11-10.

Timing depends on the tree

The Minnesota Extension source says the late dormant season is best for most pruning. It lists exceptions for spring bloomers, sap-flowing trees and conifers. It also warns against pruning oaks during the disease-risk period described on that page. Do not turn a northern US calendar into a fixed calendar for all of Canada or Britain.

Use our pruning calendar as a planning prompt. Then ask a local arborist or extension service about species, disease activity and local weather. Report broken or dangerous branches promptly rather than waiting for a routine seasonal visit.

Paint is not routine aftercare

Minnesota Extension says wound dressing is not normally needed. Its oak wilt advice describes a disease-related exception. Ask the arborist to explain any proposed coating or treatment and identify the local guidance behind it. Avoid accepting a routine treatment with no stated purpose.

Before work starts, confirm cleanup, access and the areas that must stay clear. Keep a photo record from safe ground. After work, compare the result to the agreed scope and record any follow-up recommendation.

All cited pages were fetched 2026-11-10. The TCIA summary supports discussion of the standard, not a claim that this guide contains the standard.

Frequently asked questions

Is “prune to ANSI A300” a full scope?

TCIA says A300 helps develop specifications. Ask for a written scope that identifies the tree, objective and work to be done.