

Wild Apple Tree Pruning w/ Bruce Robinson: Proper Cuts and Tree Response

Bruce spent some time with the group stressing the importance of a proper pruning cut. Regardless of a good or bad cut, any pruning cut creates a wound in the tree. The tree will react to wounds with a growth response. The effectiveness of the pruning cut is often reflected in the tree's response.

A well placed & executed cut will allow the tree to form a nice 'donut' or circle of wound wood around the surface of the wound. There will be few, if any, epicormic sprouts around the wound, and the wound will progressively close overtop of the exposed cut surface.

A poor pruning cut will impede the development of wound wood, and often cause the growth of numerous epicormic sprouts. Symptoms of wood decay may be noticeable in and around a poor cut a few years later.

The following pictures and captions will show growth responses from good and bad cuts, and how Bruce remedies a poor cut with a good one.



This old pruning wound is not healing properly.



From another angle we can see that the former branch was cut about 6" up from the fork where it met the bole of the tree. Leaving this large of a stub impedes formation of wound wood.

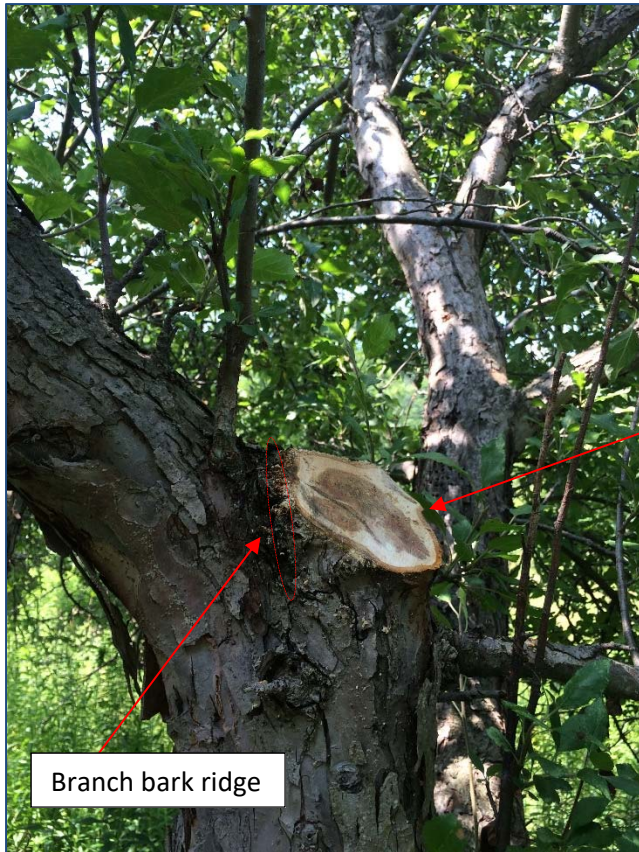
Instead of focusing energy on wound wood the tree responded with a flush of epicormic sprouts.

The exposed wood at the cut has since stained dark. Without wound wood development these fibers will remain exposed increasing the likelihood of advanced rot and decay traveling down into the bole of the tree.

The branch bark ridge is the reference point for where the top side of the cut should be made. Ideally the top of the cut should start just outside this ridge.

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Branch bark ridge



Bruce demonstrates how to correct the poor cut with a new one starting just outside the branch bark ridge. The placement of the new wound should encourage a response with wound wood formation. This wound will have a better chance of healing over. This also removes the epicormics which were poorly attached to the stub. They would likely otherwise fail and tear-off the tree at some point in the future.



Here is an example of a healing wound from a branch pruned-off during last year's workshop. Notice the formation of the 'donut' like wound wood all the way around the cut. This wound will likely heal completely over in 2-3 more growing seasons. After that only a bump will reveal a branch had ever been there.

Had any part of the cut been made too deep (inward of the branch bark ridge or branch collar) you would see a break in the 'donut' where no wound wood develops. So it is important to not leave too much of a stub, but it's also important to avoid cutting into the barrier between the branch and bole.