

## WHEN TO PRUNE BLACK WALNUT TREES

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Most foresters and hardwood forest landowners in the Central United States believe you must prune black walnut trees from late winter to early spring (February-April). In fact, I expect more trees have been pruned during this time frame than all other times of year combined. The theory is to prune before the growing season so the wound will cover faster. The British and Europeans believe that summer pruning of black walnut trees is the better time. Which time is more correct? If both viewpoints are right, the opportunity to prune our walnut crop trees greatly increases.

Having always pruned in early spring, I cannot believe I am making the following statement. However, after two trips to France and one to England to learn how to better grow and manage black walnut trees, I believe the advantages of summer pruning outweighs the late winter to early spring pruning. Here's why!

Beginning in late February through April the sap flow on black walnut is tremendous. Often before one can complete pruning a branch, the sap is dripping from the wound. Sometimes this is almost a steady stream. This sap may attract fungal diseases which are much more prevalent in spring when it is cool and damp. Although the saw blade should be disinfected (95% ethanol is best) between trees to help prevent the spread of disease, the sap acts as an attractant, and cool, damp weather can make early pre-leaf out pruning much more dangerous or risky from a disease standpoint. In summer sap flow is not a problem and fungal diseases are much less active in hot weather. Another problem associated with sap flow is that when pruning a limb larger than one inch, the sap soaks the sawdust and makes pruning very, very difficult, particularly when reaching high into the tree. When you finally get done, the saw teeth are filled with wet, sticky sawdust and must be cleaned by hand before proceeding.

Many landowners much prefer summer morning pruning to cold, damp, often wet spring days. Also, many landowners can tell which limbs are more important to prune when the tree is leafed out and they can better see the flushing pattern of the crown, as well as determine the actual amount of foliage they will be removing. I know I have a tendency to over prune in the spring when there are no leaves versus summer when I can see the crown in full foliage. Also, correcting leader problems is much easier in summer while the limbs are growing and flexible than in the dormant season after the new year's growth has hardened off.

Perhaps the most important reason for summer pruning is that some research has shown there is less bole or epicurean sprouting in summer and maximum bole sprouting in the Feb./ March/April/May period.

Summer pruning starts the wound covering process before fall; thus lets the tree often cover the wound the following growing season.

In summary, pruning black walnuts in the summer results in less sap flow, less chance of spreading fungal diseases, less bole sprouting, better working conditions, best time to correct leader problems, and a better view of the crown than pruning in late winter/early spring.

Researchers state that you should not prune when the tree is flushing (leafing out in mid-April to mid-May).

Two important things to remember: No matter which season you prefer, prune your crop trees for added value. Also, no matter what the season, prune from the top down, not from the bottom up. If you don't know what this means, attend your next Walnut Council field day.

There are two times a year when a landowner can prune black walnut, winter (late November, December and January) and usually early February (if it isn't warm and there is no sap flow). Take your pick.