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## The Right Tool For the Job

Dennis Hinkamp  
*Utah State University*

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## GARDEN NOTES

# THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

*By Dennis Hinkamp*

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Most pruning equipment is bought, used a couple of times, then left to rust in the garage or used to trim the dog's toenails. The reason most often is that the wrong tool was purchased in the first place.

So, what pruning equipment do you really need for your yard and landscape?

“There seems to be as many different pruning tools as there are plants to be pruned,” says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. “You arrive at the store to buy a simple pruner, only to be bombarded with choosing from a wall full of everything from bow saws to motorized pole pruners. The temptation is to buy anything that is on sale and hope it does the job. Withstand this temptation.”

The most common pruning tool is a hand pruner, Goodspeed says. It is used for cutting perennials and any woody stem that is less than the width of your thumb. For this job choose bypass pruners over the anvil type. A sharp bypass pruner is less damaging to the stem being cut and is easier to maintain. A good hand pruner may cost between \$25 and \$45, but they will last for up to 15 years.

For pruning wood about the diameter of a good shovel handle, buy a dependable pair of bypass loppers, he suggests. Again, avoid the anvil type. They have a tendency to smash the wood and not cut the limb nice and clean. The long-handled loppers are especially useful because they give leverage.

“A good pair of loppers can cost between \$45 and \$75,” Goodspeed says. “I use my loppers more than any other pruning tool, which is why I feel it’s critical to get a good strong pair that can be kept sharp.”

For wood that is larger in diameter than a sledge hammer handle you’ll need a pruning saw, he says. Most homeowners don't need to cut large branches, but if the need does arise, a pruning saw or a bow saw should be used. A pruning saw folds up into the handle and is a bit safer to carry while climbing a ladder up into a tree. These saws cost between \$20 and \$45.

One problem with bow saws is the handle can get in the way, making it tricky to cut hard-to-reach branches, he says. It also has an open blade, which may be a bit hazardous when moving through trees and up ladders. They are, however, less expensive than a pruning saw.

Pole pruners are great for getting a kite off the roof or a ball out of the gutter, but they are generally misused when it comes to pruning, Goodspeed says. People commonly use them when they do not want to use a ladder to cut a tall branch. Generally, they make poor pruning cuts and take quite a bit of practice to learn how to use properly. The telescoping handles on pole pruners make it possible to reach the top of many fruit trees without using a ladder. Use them for smaller limbs (1 to 1 ½ inches in diameters).

“The next tool is a chain saw, which I don't normally recommend,” he says. “They sound cool and make it easy to cut a branch or two, but are also often misused. If a chainsaw is required for pruning, it may be time to consider another tree. Of course, maybe that is why you need the chain saw. A small chain saw runs anywhere from \$75 to \$125.”

Before going to the nursery to buy a pruning tool, know for sure what you are going to cut, Goodspeed says. Then, buy the tool that is best suited for the job. Of course, another alternative might be to buy someone else's time to do the pruning, and leave selecting the right tool up to them.

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