

Pruning Hemlocks

Hemlock Hedge

Hemlocks planted for an evergreen hedge can add beauty to the landscape all year long. Growing formal or informal hemlock hedges only requires that you trim the hedge at the right time of year and use the proper trimming techniques.

Timing: The best time to prune hemlocks is in late winter, just before spring growth begins. If the hemlock is growing vigorously, it can be pruned again in late spring or very early summer to keep it from getting too large. Except in the case of emergency pruning, which can be done any time of the year to remove damaged, broken or diseased wood, do not prune a hemlock in the summer or fall.



A **formal hemlock hedge** can be sheared with hedge shears to tidy the overall surface. However, more selective thinning should be done early in the season to "open up" the shrub and let sunlight reach the inner branches. A hedge should be shaped like a wedge, so that the base is wider than the top. This lets sunlight reach the lower branches, which prevents the bottom branches from dying off and giving the entire hedge a scraggly appearance.

An **informal hemlock hedge** needs very little pruning since the natural form of the hemlock is part of the hedge's beauty. Prune this kind of hedge to improve the health of the shrubs by removing any damaged growth or branches that rub against each other. Thin the hedge by removing a few of the oldest branches in the center of the hedge each year.

Tools: Keep the use of hedge shears to a minimum. Although hemlocks tolerate shearing better than most narrow-leaf evergreens, they will suffer from frequent shearing. Use loppers or a pruning saw for thinning and shaping a hemlock hedge. Make sure all cutting tools have sharp blades so they can make clean cuts without ragged edges. If you are cutting out diseased wood, sterilize the blades with alcohol or bleach after use so that disease is not transmitted to a different tree. Also see https://www.ehow.com/how_6695286_prune-canadian-hemlock.html#ixzz0wSKUnwK4.

Individual Hemlocks

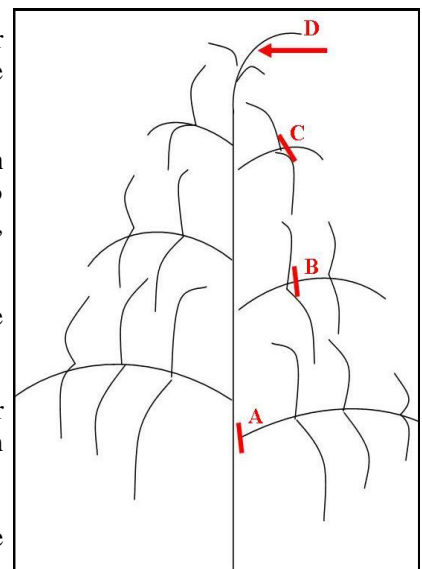
The information provided in the above article regarding timing and tools for pruning a hemlock hedge applies to individual hemlocks as well. Here are some special instructions when pruning an individual tree.

A. To remove a whole branch, cut straight vertically and leave a 1/4 to 1/2 inch stub next to the trunk so you don't cut into the branch collar. It's not necessary to use pruning tar. If you want to shorten a branch but not remove the whole branch, see step C.

B. To remove dead / damaged tissue, cut near the next joint interior to the damaged part. This should be done as soon after the injury as possible.

C. To stimulate new growth and make the plant bushier, cut just outside a joint or needle whorl near the end of the branch. Don't cut back into the part of the branch where there are no more branchlets.

D. Don't prune off the topmost leader unless it's damaged or you want to turn the tree into a shrub. This apical meristem is responsible for the tree growing taller.



Note: When small containerized or bare root trees are planted in the ground, they usually get fuller and fluffier on their own. However, if you want to do periodic pruning for shapely growth, it's best to start in late winter of the first year after the tree is planted. Also see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvZh1G2VuMU>

