TRADECRAFT

Pruning a Japanese maple

Thin it, don't clip it. Branch by branch.

DRAFT V0.6, PENDING INSTALLER REVIEW

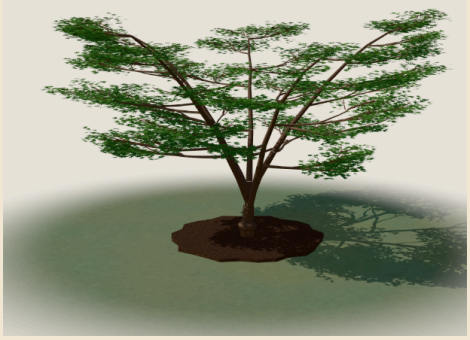
THE STEPS ON VIDEO

3 RULES

1 Whole branches, not tips

2 Never flat like a hedge

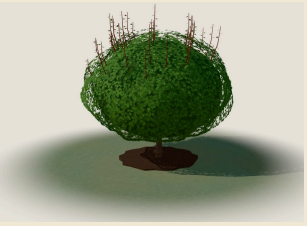
3 A little each visit



KEY NUMBERS

25%	of the crown per visit, at most
12–18"	undercut, out from the trunk
2"	largest cut when shortening a main limb
70%	alcohol to disinfect tools

Clip a maple flat and it turns into a ball of hard shoots. You're back every year, and the customer stops calling.



FINISHED LOOK

Japanese maple (Acer palmatum 'Bloodgood')	1 pieces

Colour not chosen yet

STOP AND CHECK

If you think twice, don't cut. Established tree: as little as possible.

- > 25% of the crown in one visit: the rest waits
- Cut > 2" shortening a main limb: avoid
- Trunk below the graft: never cut it
- Climbing or chainsaw: arborist work

STEPS

1 Read the tree

- All the way around; below, inside
- Heavy thinning leaves off; summer, light
- Just leafed out in spring: nothing heavy

Check: You know which layers stay

2 Clean out first

- Dead, damaged, diseased: out any visit
- Crossing: old one out, young stays
- Shoots below the graft (low bump): out

Check: Nothing dead or below the graft

3 Thin: see through it

- Whole branch, at its base or fork
- Never mid-branch: it sprouts a broom
- Water sprouts, hard upright shoots: at base

Check: Every branch ends in a fine tip

4 Open the layers

- Branch dropping or climbing a layer: out
- Shorten to a side branch at least one third as thick as the part removed
- Don't cut the top or strip branches

Check: Sky shows between the layers

5 The cut

- Collar: the swollen ring at the base
- Outside the collar: not flush, no stub
- Heavy limb: under 12–18" out, top, collar

Check: Collar whole, bark not torn

6 Know when to stop

- 25% of the crown per visit, at most
- Mature tree: spread the work over more visits
- Open it slowly: hot sun burns bark

Check: Every few cuts: step back, look around

THE 3 COSTLIEST MISTAKES

✕ Clipped flat, even tips: a ball of shoots

✓ Whole branches out; fine tips stay

✕ Topped to make it shorter: regrows fast and messy

✓ Don't fight the height; adjust the width

✕ Dull or dirty tools: torn cuts, disease spread

✓ Sharp; 70% alcohol between trees and on diseased wood

This job's local rule: The best season changes with the climate. Some cities protect certain trees or limit how much can be pruned, and each place says where branches go.

Hard-surface limit: _____ Water goes to: _____ Permit? yes / no

STAY SAFE

Best practice: glasses and gloves; twig ends sit at eye level, and your free hand stays away from the saw.

From the ground or a firm stepladder, no overreaching.

No hung branches: everything out of the tree and off the beds before you leave.

Sources: ISA, Pruning Mature Trees; ANSI A300 Part 1 (UT Extension and Maryland DNR summaries); UC Master Gardeners; Ohio State BYGL; UW-Madison PDDC; Portland Japanese Garden (Uchiyama, Hosono); Morita Zouen; Sharing Tech; Rakuteire; Fine Gardening. Sources disagree on the per-visit limit; this sheet uses ISA's.

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