



Forestry Fact Sheet 7  
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MICHIGAN STATE  
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EXTENSION

## Pruning Red Pine

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### What is Pruning?

Pruning is a cultural practice in which the lower branches of trees are removed to permit formation of clear, knot-free wood.

### What Stands Should I Prune?

Prune only those plantations situated on good soils so that the trees will be able to produce a maximum amount of knot-free wood. Only prune about 150 of the best trees per acre. Choose well-formed trees (with no forks or crooks) that have small limbs. Leave trees along the edges of plantations unpruned to provide wind protection to the plantation and to reduce the drying effects of the wind to the litter and soil.

### When Should Pruning Take Place?

Pruning is perhaps best delayed until after the first thinning. While this will mean less knot-free lumber is produced, it avoids having pruned trees cut and removed in the first thinning. This wastes both time and money. Economic studies have shown that there is no economic advantage to pruning higher than nine feet off the ground. Beyond nine feet, pruning becomes much more difficult and costly, and the increase in price obtained from the higher quality knot-free wood produced is not enough to offset these increased costs.

While red pine can be safely pruned during any season of the year, pruning is usually done during the fall and winter for several reasons. Like all growing plants, trees are more easily damaged during the growing season, and more care must be taken to prevent injury to the stem through tearing or wounding the bark. Also, pruning is hard work and is more comfortable accomplished during cooler weather.

### How to Prune

Cut branches close to the main stem to promote early healing and to prevent the formation of loose knots. Research has shown that even though scars are larger when the limbs are cut close to the bole of the tree, healing is more rapid and complete than when a short stub with a wound of smaller diameter is left. Be sure to prune both live and dead branches since dead branches actually create worse knots than live ones.

The most widely used and recommended pruning tool is the saw. Do not use axes, hatchets, or machetes in pruning because, even in experienced hands, they are certain to cause excessive damage to the tree. Stubs will inevitably be left.