

Form-pruning eucalypts - guidelines

Why form-prune?

If you want to grow eucalypts for posts, poles and sawlogs, your trees need to have a single straight stem. Eucalypts may form double leaders and occasional large branches. Form-pruning can remove these defects early in the life of the tree.

When should I form prune?

Form pruning can begin on fast growing trees after 1 year; however, it is essential once the diameter of the tree's main stem at 'breast height' (1.4m above the ground) reaches around 8cm. By this time (usually around 2-3 years old) the tree will be tall enough to start forming the butt log, the most valuable part of the tree.

Form pruning is best done in dry weather, ideally in late summer/early autumn, to reduce the risk of fungal infection getting into wounds.

How many trees do I need to form-prune?

Form-pruning is quick and easy if done when the trees are young. We advise that you prune all trees except any obvious 'runts'.

How high do I go?

The more straight, clear logs a tree can produce, the higher its likely timber value. Often a single form-prune early in the life of a eucalypt will be enough for it to develop a strong central leader, and it will grow into a tall straight tree. This can be followed by 1-3 clear pruning lifts (removal of **all** branches from the stem to a given height) to whatever clearwood height the grower wants to go to and further form-pruning in the upper crown should defects develop.

Are all eucalypt species the same when it comes to form pruning?

Most species require form pruning but the amount of form pruning needed does vary between species. Some, but not all, eucalypt species shed their branches as they get older (self-prune) which reduces the need for clear pruning.

What tools do I need?

Secateurs, loppers, and a small jacksaw or pruning saw. A long-handle pruning secateur can be useful. All tools should be kept sharp, and be the right size and weight for the person using them and the job at hand.

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Six top pruning tips

- Reduce double-leader trees to one leader by removing the smaller or more crooked leader, or the one on the leeward side.
- Better to leave a 15mm branch stub than damage the branch collar or main stem.
- Remove or shorten any large branches (ramicorns), so the tree is well-balanced.
- Remove steep-angled branches (stem/branch angle less than 30⁰), and twisted branches.
- Try not to remove more than 40% of the total foliage; leave trees enough 'green engine' to grow.
- However, multi-leadered or damaged trees can be cut right back just above ground level and left to produce a new leader from the regrowth (coppice).

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