



## Pruning And Trimming

*(Author's Note: This is the ninth in a series of articles by members of the City of Sanibel Vegetation Committee dealing with vegetative matters of concern to island residents. For more information regarding Sanibel's unique plants and wildlife, go to the City of Sanibel's Natural Resources webpage (link below) and click on the link "2009 Environmental Reference Handbook" on the right hand side of the page.)*

<http://www.mysanibel.com/Departments/Natural-Resources>

Nature doesn't usually require pruning, we do it to keep our yard attractive and healthy. Also, preventative pruning keeps our homes and property borders from serious damage during severe wind and heavy rainfall.

### **These are the several goals of pruning:**

1. Ornamental maintenance of your landscape
2. Health requirements of the plant: tree, shrub, or flower
3. Local utility requirements at site borders near paths or beneath power lines
4. Preventative damage pruning, around personal structures, roofs, pool cages and the like, in event of bad weather and storms

### **Did you know?**

Each year, Sanibel allows a 25% "hair-cut" for all property vegetation (except endangered or threatened species) without permit requirement. Any trimming of native vegetation in excess of 25% of the leaf surface annually requires a permit from Sanibel Planning Department. Removal and trimming of non-native vegetation is allowable anytime. As a homeowner, you may obtain a permit yourself or you may authorize your contractor to do so on your behalf. Either way, read the permit carefully and be sure you fully understand what is permitted and any special conditions or mitigation requirements that may apply.

Your Sanibel landscapers are REQUIRED to be licensed by the city after passing an extensive vegetation course and are an excellent source of: What to prune, When to

prune, Where to prune and How. Ask your landscaper to show you their Sanibel license before they begin work. If they don't have one, they can not work legally on Sanibel.

If you intend to do most of the upkeep yourself there are a few things you should be aware of. We live in a 4-season climate with heavy rainfall from mid April through September. In El Niño years, rainfall increases in frequency during the winter months, which is typically our dry season. Our climate is described as sub-tropical.

Generally, one should prune just before a season changes, hot, cold, wet or dry. Additionally, pruning is acceptable at the end of a flowering cycle or before dormancy of your plant or tree (think red maple or gumbo limbo). Pruning should not be performed during dormancy unless removing "deadwood" (think palm fronds). Deadwood removal can be done anytime of year on Sanibel without worry to the health of the plant.

Some prefer the look of palms when the previous cycle's fronds and/or berries are trimmed and removed. The fronds including the stem should be fully yellow, indicating that their carbohydrates have already been used-up by the tree. It is important to keep in mind that the berries of palms are a source of food for many of our critters, raccoons and birds, so removing them eliminates a food source.

The "hurricane-cut" that is often recommend by landscapers is harmful or deadly to palm health. It is detrimental to your tree's stability because the layered frond structure of the head has been compromised and will no longer be able to absorb the shock of strong winds. When left intact these trees have ability to protect your home and other external structures from the elements by deflecting and disturbing strong gusts around straight structures like the walls of your house. Therefore, remove only dead or fully yellowed fronds. Ask your landscaper to show you his license and just say "no" to the "hurricane-cut" if it is recommended. The correct professional cut is a "10 o'clock and 2 o'clock" (or, even better, 9-3) trimming of fronds on the canopy.



Unpruned Cabbage Palm  
(Photo City of Sanibel)



Harsh pruning  
(Photo City of Sanibel)



Proper Cut  
(Photo manateebeautiful.com)

Remember, Sanibel is a "SANCTUARY ISLAND" meaning that it is a sanctuary for wildlife. It is imperative that if you plan any pruning and trimming you should be cognizant of the plant's flowering, seed and berry production timing as that's critical for providing food and nectar for wildlife and will not impair that symbiotic relationship of plants and animals.

Trimming is not the same as pruning. Trimming is plant maintenance; to produce a particular shape or form, maintain a certain height, or create a compact and dense plant. Pruning entails the selective removal of plant parts, such as branches, buds or roots, to improve plant health or prevent potential property damage from encroachment.

### Helpful tips for pruning:

1. Knowledge of seasonal weather cycles as well as individual plant growth and flowering cycles will help you determine appropriate pruning time frames. Remember, our climate is described as sub-tropical, so there is a period of dormancy. We generally suggest NOT pruning OR trimming after October. These activities can stimulate new growth that may potentially stress plants during temperature extremes, i.e. heavy rainfall in our normally dry winter season or extreme cold.

2. Knowledge of your plant species, and its individual needs is imperative. Pruning at the wrong time may result in the cutting off of buds, loss of desired height increases or undue stress to the plant in the next growing cycle. Again, after October, pruning may not be beneficial.
3. Cleaning your tools is also important whether you are trimming or pruning. This practice is beneficial to plant health by preventing the spread of disease from one plant to another within a yard or to another yard, when your neighbor borrows your clippers and saws.