

## Safe Use of Pole Saws

When a thick branch or vine needs to be cut and you can't reach it from the ground with a pruning saw, you have three choices: prune from a ladder, use a pole saw, or call in a professional.

This article will tell you how to safely and efficiently use a pole saw to make a clean pruning cut even 14 feet high. Please, however, take warning first that working on high wood can be very dangerous. Before you use a pole saw for your first time, read all the cautions here and make sure that this is really a job you should be attempting yourself.

### Cautions About Pole Saw Use

Once you are starting to think about pruning wood that you can't reach from the ground, you're getting into potentially dangerous territory. When professional arborists drop a large piece of wood, they use ropes in a pulley system to safely slow its descent to the ground. When you and I cut branches with pole saws and pruners, we can't do that; we have to let the wood drop uncontrolled. High or heavy wood can damage, hurt, and kill when it falls.

- Pole saws are intended to use on limbs up to a couple of inches thick. The thicker the wood, the more dangerous, and the slower and more tiring it will be to cut.
- You must not attempt to fell branches overhead until you are familiar with techniques for reducing weight before making a final cut by making preliminary and jump cut with your pole tools.
- Pole saws, especially with extensions to get above 8 feet, are heavy and tiring to work with.
- Never, ever, ever work near power lines or on branches with any part above a power line.

### Pole Saw Pruning, General Technique

1. **Clear a large work area** below the branch you are felling of all people and property and cordon off the area or otherwise keep people from re-entering. Also clear the area of any trip hazards like fallen branches, and take note of ones you can't move, like exposed roots. You need to be able to move quickly and safely in your area in case something goes wrong.
2. **Plan where you will need to cut.** Remember that the removal of single branch usually requires many preliminary and jump cuts reduce the weight before your final cut. Try to make cuts at horizontal or nearly horizontal surfaces of the branch or vine, if you have a choice.
  - In most cuts, the blade starts from the top side of the branch.
  - When making a jump cut, the blade will cut from underneath the branch. This will be much more physically taxing cut since you work against gravity.
  - Water sprouts, which are vertical, are hard or impossible to cut properly from the ground with a pole saw.

3. **Position the saw.** With both hands, bring your pole saw to a vertical position and pause there to control its weight. Now reposition the saw to your cutting spot, with its weight resting on the branch (unless you are making a jump cut).
4. **Position yourself.** Holding the tool, move to a place where you can hold your end at chest level while standing well off to the side of the limb, never below it. In other words, your pole will be on an angle while you cut, not directly up and down. If your pole is adjustable, you may need to lengthen it to make this possible.
5. **Begin cutting with a starting groove.** Make the first strokes slowly and in control, cutting perpendicular to the branch so that your first strokes bite in as much as possible, even if the rest of your cut needs to go a different direction. The idea is to create a groove in the wood to guide your later, faster strokes. On these early strokes, your saw will want to slip sideways if the branch is sloped; expect this. When it slips, stop, gather your energy, and reposition the saw before you continue.
6. **Continue and finish your cut.** Once the saw is securely in the groove you can increase your stroke speed. Pole saws, just like pruning saws, cut on the pull stroke, helped by gravity. Keep your eye on the branch, especially as it nears the point of falling, to be ready to safely retreat if you need to.
7. **Clean up your work area.** Clear the fallen limbs out of your work area before beginning the next cut, so that it does not trip you up.