

# APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner Application Packet

Thank you for your interest in the APA Certified Aesthetic Pruner (CAP) program. This packet outlines everything needed to complete the CAP process. The APA is committed to working with you throughout this process and offers you our full support as you pursue certification.

The Certified Aesthetic Pruner designation indicates a high level of proficiency in applying the art and science of aesthetic pruning in a variety of situations. CAPs are adept pruners who understand design and art principles. Combining these skills, they bring harmony, interest and beauty to gardens and outdoor spaces. They possess craft skills and professionalism that are exemplary in the field.

Certification is available for APA members in good standing who have a minimum of 3 years experience as a professional pruner and meet the prerequisites outlined in this packet. The review process, overseen by our Certification Committee, evaluates a candidate's submitted work and administers the in-person testing which includes written, oral and hands on phases.

The APA Certification Committee convenes twice a year to review applications for CAPs. Currently, the evaluations take place in April and October. Applications are due by the first day of the month prior to the review (March 1 and September 1).

CAP candidates are expected to demonstrate a deep understanding of horticultural, arboricultural, design and art principles. Each submission is judged on its own merits and is not compared to the work of others. Send as much documentation as you feel is necessary for the Certification Committee to fully appreciate your efforts and expertise. Enclosed you will find additional information on the criteria to help you prepare a complete submission.

Note that all applications and test results are treated confidentially by the APA Certification Committee and the APA Officers and Board Members. Thank you for your interest in the CAP program. For further information and questions please contact the Chair of the Craft Standards Committee at: [craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org](mailto:craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org)

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- FAQ
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## CAP Application Checklist of Required Items

To be considered for certification, an applicant must meet the following criteria and provide the required documentation to the Certification Committee (CC) of the Aesthetic Pruners Association (APA) by the first day of the month prior to the test month. **Current due dates are March 1 and September 1:**

- 1) Document a minimum of 3 years experience as a professional pruner. To do this you must provide the CC with 3 completed Client Endorsement Forms from clients. You must also provide us with copies of old invoices, advertising, or other such items that document 3 years experience as a professional pruner.
- 2) Provide completed CAP Recommendation Forms from 3 current CAPs. See the included documents in this packet for more information on how to achieve this.
- 3) Be currently working as a professional aesthetic pruner with pruning being an integral part of your business. (By integral, the CC is looking for around 1,000 billable hours per year. However, we realize that every pruner's situation is unique, so the final decision as to what qualifies as integral will be decided by the CC. Overall, we are testing for a certain skill set, not a minimum time commitment.) Document this through things like your portfolio, the letters of recommendation, invoices, work calendars, etc.
- 4) Provide written letters from a suitable organization documenting 30 hours of volunteer work in the last year. At least 10 of these hours must have been in aesthetic pruning.
- 5) Provide a written resume of your training and career in pruning. Focus on your pruning origins and the last 5 years of your career. Include all relevant horticultural and arboricultural experience - the more detail the better.
- 6) Provide the CC with a portfolio of your work that demonstrates your ability to prune 30 different kinds of trees. See the included documents in this packet for more details on what we are looking for in a portfolio.
- 7) In addition to the 30 trees detailed in your portfolio, provide the CC with a written list of 20 more trees you have a basic pruning knowledge of.

After the Certification Committee has reviewed all of the above and verified that it meets our requirements, an applicant will be eligible to take the CAP test. If the above prerequisites are not met to our satisfaction, we will let you know what was lacking and where you stand in the application process.

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the CAP Process**

**How much does the test cost?** \$95

**How and when do I pay?** Payment is due when you submit your portfolio to the Certification Committee. Mail everything to *APA Certification 4123 Broadway #803 • Oakland • CA • 94611*. Make checks payable to the Aesthetic Pruners Association.

**What happens if my application is turned down?** If after looking at all of your submitted materials the Certification Panel feels you are not ready to take the test, you will be notified and the panel will let you what you can do to improve. All materials will be returned to you, including your test fee.

**What form can my portfolio be in?** What ever form works best for you. An electronic form on CD is easiest for the Certification Committee to pass around amongst ourselves, but a hand written or printed out form is fine too. A video portfolio with narration could also work.

**What happens to my portfolio?** Your portfolio will be returned to you at the same time you are notified of your test results.

**What happens if I fail the test?** You will be apprised as to what sections you failed, why, and what you need to work on. You can retake the failed section(s) once in the next two testing cycles (6 months and 1 year).

**When will I know if I passed the test?** You will be informed by letter within 30 days of your test date.

**What happens if I pass the test?** If you passed the test, you will receive an invitation to join the APA as a Certified Member and information outlining how to access and use your new benefits. If you passed in April, you will need to pay \$12.50 (1/2 of difference in Membership Levels) to upgrade for one-half year of Certified Membership. If you passed in October, you will need to pay full Certified Membership dues for the following year. You will be formally recognized at the next general meeting of the APA.

**What is the appeal process if I disagree with the Certification Committee's decisions?** All evaluation results are final. There is no appeal of test scores. Any complaints about the process should be submitted to the Corresponding Secretary of the APA with in thirty days of learning your results.

**How do I maintain my CAP status over the years?** You must stay current with your yearly dues and continue to prune professionally. Starting in 2013, all CAP's will be required to complete Continuing Education Units (CEU's). Details will be provided to all CAP's well in advance of any new requirements.

## APA's Definition of Aesthetic Pruning Terms

**Basic Art Principles:** These include unity, balance, emphasis, contrast, proportion, scale, visual mass, space, negative space, depth, texture, light, line, movement, transition, coarse to fine, shading, perspective, framing, repetition.

### **Essence of a Tree:**

- 1) Garden context and the role of the tree in the garden. The surroundings and the tree's relationship to them.
- 2) Identify the "It Factor". What elements or aspects make the essence of this individual tree? Look for it in the following areas:
  - A) Permanent features such as structure, form, style, branch movement, bark, old age, etc.
  - B) Temporary features such as flowers, fruit, leaves, fall color, young age, etc.
  - C) Motion and movement.
  - D) Lines: leading, guiding, framing.
  - E) Definition: an area, a space, a view, the entire garden.
  - F) Light: Shadows and silhouettes.
  - G) Sound: Cannot the wind blowing thru leaves bring the sound of water to an otherwise dry landscape?
- 3) Finally, all other aspects of the tree must be in balance, helping to define and elevate the essence of the tree.

### **Focal Point Pruning:**

In addition to pruning to bring out a tree's essence as laid out above, focal point pruning is defined by:

- 1) Having a plan. Have a multi-year plan.
- 2) Structure. Coarse to fine. Proportion and transition; flow and movement from the roots to the trunk through to the branch tips. Space in the tree.
- 3) Ramification.
- 4) Hide and conceal pruning cuts.
- 5) Attention to detail. Every inch of the tree is considered.
- 6) Every aspect of the tree is in balance. Essence vs. Other aspects, Primary vs. Secondary, Bold vs. Subtle, Wood vs. Foliage, Permanent vs. Temporary, Current look vs. Future look, Tree vs. Garden.
- 7) Prune for the primary viewpoint(s) and view time(s).
- 8) Tree should draw and hold the eye.

### **Winter Silhouette:**

- 1) Essence of the tree is clearly defined.
- 2) Structure. Coarse to fine. Proportion and transition; flow and movement from the roots to the trunk through to the branch tips.
- 3) Ramification.
- 4) Visible nice root crown and roots.
- 5) Hide and conceal pruning cuts.
- 6) Can incorporate the art of deterioration.

The winter silhouette can really be enhanced by a proper background. In areas with mild winters, the winter silhouette can help to bring a sense of seasonality.

### **Garden Context:**

- 1) The essence, style, intent and mood of the garden - Japanese, Native, Formal, Informal, etc.
- 2) The context that surrounds and/or influences the garden. Includes the home and other non-garden hardscape as well as people and our needs.

# **APA CAP In-Person Evaluation Summary**

The CAP In-Person Evaluation is divided into 3 phases: Written Exam, Oral Exam, and Hands-On Demonstration which all take place on the same day. To successfully complete the CAP In-Person Evaluation, applicants must successfully pass each phase and achieve an overall minimum score.

The Written Exam is objective and scored against a key. The Oral Exam and Hands-On Demonstration are subjective by nature. As such, they are each graded simultaneously by 3 members of the APA Certification Committee. To pass these elements applicants must receive a passing score from 2 of the 3 examining panel members.

Each phase of the in-person evaluation lasts approximately 1 hour. Applicants should expect waiting time between the written, oral and hands-on exams and plan to be on-site for a full day.

## **Written Exam**

The written exam verifies the applicant's knowledge in 6 main areas: horticultural and arboricultural practices, legal and ethical issues, and art and design principles. Those who have successfully completed courses in Basic Horticulture, Plant Identification, Arboriculture and Aesthetic Pruning should find the exam challenging, but passable.

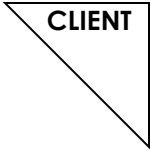
## **Oral Exam**

The oral exam involves a walk through a garden with 3 members of the Certification Committee. Applicant's are asked to identify plants and are questioned about the garden's design and how it would be better served through the practice of aesthetic pruning. Additionally, specific questions regarding aesthetic pruning will be asked by the committee members.

## **Hands-On Demonstration**

Applicants are provided with plant material to prune in front of three members of the Certification Committee. Committee members may insert additional circumstances and scenarios to add context and complexity to the assignment. For instance, the committee may ask the applicant to regard the plant material as growing near a certain garden feature, or that it is a particular time of year, etc.

Applicants are expected to evaluate the plant material's possibilities and devise a plan or plans for developing the plant material accordingly. After explaining their plan to the committee, applicants will prune the plant material and provide such commentary on their work as they can. The Hands-On Demonstration is evaluated in four main areas: Tree Assessment, Quality of Plan, Pruning Skills, and Aesthetics.



Date:

Client's Name:

Street:

City, State and Zip code:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am applying to become a Certified Aesthetic Pruner (CAP). This designation, awarded by the Aesthetic Pruners Association (APA), requires demonstrating a high level of proficiency in applying the art and science of aesthetic pruning. As part of this certification process, I have been asked to provide referrals from three clients.

Would you please complete the attached client recommendation form? Your honest observations will provide the Certification Committee with the client's perspective of my pruning work. Your responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared or distributed in any way.

If you have any questions or would like further information about the CAP process, please see the APA website at [www.aestheticprunersassociation.org](http://www.aestheticprunersassociation.org), or email the Craft Standards Committee at [craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org](mailto:craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org).

Kindly return the form in the enclosed addressed envelope within two weeks of the above date. No postage is necessary.

Your prompt reply is most appreciated.

Sincerely,

**Client Recommendation Form for the CAP Process**

Date:

Your Name:

Applicant's Name:

1. By what means were you introduced to the applicant?

An acquaintance

A professional in the horticulture trade

A client of the applicant

Website

APA Directory

Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Over what period of time has the applicant worked for you?

From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the number of trees and shrubs the applicant is pruning from you?

1 - 2 trees or shrubs

3 - 5 trees or shrubs

More than 5 trees or shrubs

4. Please provide the names of the tree(s) or shrub(s) pruned.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Approximately how many times in a year will the applicant visit your residence for pruning?

Once per year

2 - 3 times per year

More than 3 times per year

6. How often do you check on the applicant's work?

Hourly

Every 2 - 3 hours

Once only

Not at all

Additional comments:

7. Would you rate the quality of pruning performed by the applicant as (chosed one)

- In need of improvement
- Acceptable but needs improvement
- Acceptable
- Good but not exceptional
- Good Overall
- Excellent
- Stunning

Additional comments:

8. Kindly give us an idea of the applicant's work ethic by rating each item on a scale from 1 to 5; with 1 as poor and 5 as excellent.

- Reliable, appears at the agreed upon time and day
- Works diligently through the day
- Does not leave until the agreed upon work is completed.
- Communicates well
- Cleans up thoroughly
- Incorporates your wishes in their pruning

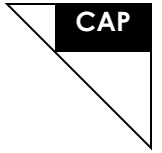
Additional comments:

9. Would you feel comfortable referring the applicant to others?

- YES     NO

10. Please include any further thoughts you wish the Certification Committee to consider regarding this applicant.





Date:

CAP's Name:

Street:

City, State and Zip Code:

I am applying to become a Certified Aesthetic Pruner (CAP). As part of the certification process, I was asked to provide referrals from three current APA Certified Aesthetic Pruners.

Would you please complete this CAP recommendation form? Your honest observations will provide the Certification Committee with the CAP's perspective of my pruning work.

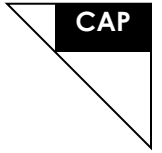
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Your prompt reply is most appreciated.

Sincerely,



## Aesthetic Pruners Association



As part of the APA's Certified Aesthetic Pruner (CAP) certification process, all applicants are asked to provide recommendations from three current CAP's. Your honest observations provide a professional pruner's perspective of the applicant.

A Certified Aesthetic Pruner is recognized for his/her integrity, sense of public service, and mastery of the aesthetic pruning craft from fellow pruners and the public. Your observations and comments support the APA's high standard of practice.

To assist you with your recommendation, please see the attached "Definition of Aesthetic Pruning Terms" to establish consistency in the usage of terms.

Draw from your experience to evaluate the applicant in the context of your knowledge of professional pruning and of the other CAP's you know.

Please make sure you have enough familiarity with the applicant's work to answer the recommendation questions in detail. Be honest about their strengths and weaknesses, as weakness in some areas will not automatically disqualify an applicant.

In submitting this recommendation you are endorsing that the applicant's overall pruning ability is at the CAP level.

All responses will be treated confidentially by the APA Craft Standards Committee. This information will not be shared or distributed.

Thank you for your efforts to sustain the Certified Aesthetic Pruner program. If you have any questions please email the Craft Standards Committee at [craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org](mailto:craftstandards@aestheticprunersassociation.org).

Sincerely,

The APA Certification Committee

## **APA's Definition of Aesthetic Pruning Terms**

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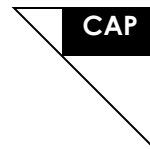
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## CAP recommendation Form for the CAP Process

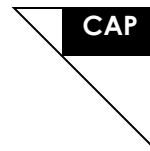
Date:

CAP's Name:

CAP #:

Applicant's Name:

1. By what means were you introduced to the applicant pruner?  
 Merritt Pruning Club or classes  
 Aesthetic Pruners Association  
 An acquaintance  
 A professional in the horticulture trade  
 Applicant pruner was known to you prior to practicing pruning.  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. How would you describe your current relationship with the applicant pruner?  
(Check all that apply)  
 Friend  
 A fellow pruner  
 Student  
 Apprentice  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What is the period of time you have known the applicant as a pruner?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ months
  
4. How often during the year do you spend time with the applicant pruner in a pruning related activity?  
 Once per year  
 2 - 3 times per year  
 More than three times per year
  
5. What is the number of trees and shrubs pruned by the applicant pruner and observed by you?  
 1 - 2 trees or shrubs  
 3 - 5 trees or shrubs  
 More than 5 trees or shrubs



6. Please provide the names of the trees or shrubs that you observed the applicant prune.

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7. Kindly rate the applicant in how he/she incorporates the following aesthetic elements in his/her work using a scale of 1 through 6 with 1 as poor, 4 as the minimum CAP level and 6 as excellent (Refer to the attached sheet for the definitions of these terms.)

	Rating
7.1. Basic Art Principals	_____
7.2. Essence of a Tree	_____
7.3. Focal Point Pruning	_____
7.4. Winter Silhouette	_____
7.5. Garden Context	_____
7.6. Professionalism	_____

8. Please rate your level of confidence in this individual on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 as no confidence, 4 as minimum CAP level confidence and 6 as highly confident. \_\_\_\_\_

9. Please take a moment to state the reasons you believe the applicant pruner is qualified to be a Certified Aesthetic Pruner. (You may use additional sheets of paper.)

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10. Please include any further comments below:

## **Portfolio Requirements**

Your portfolio is a very important part of the CAP Evaluation Process. It is the main way the Certification Committee will get to see and know your pruning work. This is your chance to really shine and show us your best trees. We will use your portfolio to visually verify that your pruning work and knowledge qualifies you to take the certification exam. And if you do qualify to take the exam, then your portfolio will become a large part of what we evaluate and grade you on. We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to give us your best possible portfolio.

Below are the principles and concepts the Certification Committee wants to see in your portfolio. We offer you as much detail as possible so that you know exactly what it is we are evaluating and testing you on. We realize this is a sizeable task, but feel this is the best way for us to thoroughly evaluate candidates and insure APA standards. You don't have to have every aspect of all this to apply for certification. Every application will be unique, but do your best to provide us with as much of the following as possible. (We have attached several examples of before and after pictures with commentary that illustrate what we are looking for.)

1) Before and after pictures that demonstrate your ability to prune 30 different kinds of trees. Within this, show us a nice variety of trees such as conifers, broadleaf evergreens, and deciduous trees. We have found it helpful to include close-ups that show your work on a specific section of the tree. We are also specifically looking for pictures of:

- focal point pruning
- pruning in the garden context
- pruning through out the seasons
- a two year restoration project
- a one year restoration project
- an immediate (one pruning) restoration project
- two examples of a pruning that wasn't your best and what was learned

In addition to showing the different types of trees and pruning, the pictures should be selected to show:

- Basic artistic principles applied to trees
- Bringing out, defining and creating the essence of the tree
- Winter silhouette work
- The tree's role, scale and look in the context of the garden and its surroundings
- Balance in all aspects of the tree: Essence vs. Other aspects, Primary vs. Secondary, Bold vs. Subtle, Wood vs. Leaves, Permanent vs. Temporary, Aesthetics vs. Functionality, Current look vs. Future look, Tree vs. Garden
- Detail work and attention to detail
- Creative problem solving
- A multi-year plan for the tree and year after year improvement
- Trees in various styles

(Please see the separate sheet "APA's Definition of Aesthetic Pruning Terms" for more detail.)

2) Written comments on all of the trees.

- For all 30 of the trees we need to know its scientific and common name, as well as the city the tree is located in and dates the photos were taken.
- For 5 of the trees we need as much detail as you can provide about the tree and your pruning work. Describe what work has been done and your plans for the future. Really expound on all of the artistic aspects of the tree and your pruning. Point out beauty created and problems solved. (Focal point trees and multi year restoration projects are good candidates here.)
- For 10 of the trees we need a moderate level of notes describing the art and science of your pruning for that particular tree. Focus on the key points you want us to see about the pruning and tree.



Acer Palmatum (Japanese Maple) Oakland, CA One pruning 6/3/09. Pruning by Bruce Thompson. Used with permission.  
**EXAMPLE OF TREE ID, LOCATION AND PRUNING DATE AS REQUIRED FOR ALL TREES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO**



*Juniperus chinensis* 'Torulosa" (Hollywood juniper) Berkeley, CA one pruning on 2/22/10

I was very excited to see this Hollywood juniper because I could immediately tell it had massive potential. It was dominating the front of their house and was only going to get bigger so I focused on establishing the tree's basic structure, reducing it in height and bulk, and getting the coarse wood out. I established proper scale, proportion and negative space and have begun to create an appropriate relationship between the house, the tree, and the client's desires for the situation. The discovery of a two trunked tree was a wonderful development, as it adds a nice bit of informality and movement to the composition. The height of this tree will now be maintained where it is. The reasons are two fold; most importantly I like how it helps to unify the house by crossing the strong horizontal line of the shingles and wood beams/stucco, while also being kept below the "eyes" of the house (the 2 windows). I feel a broad horizontal apex is appropriate for the two trunks of the tree as well as the lines of the house.

The above was done in 4 hours in mid February and is step one in what is currently a 5 year plan. The next step is to clean up each major branch and their branchlets and begin to develop more ramification and branch definition. There are also some smaller structural cuts that still need to happen to further refine the structure and get more coarse and duplicating wood out. Long term, the tree needs to be in scale and proportion with the home and fit into its space by the front entrance. These pictures are a bit cropped, but you can see the house has strong lines and offers up a commanding architectural presence. The tree needs to be strong as well to hold its own against this backdrop, so I have begun to develop lines in the tree that match the horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines of the house. My final vision for the tree is one with a strong stout structure that holds up to the architecture of house and mimics its lines, while also offering a nice detailed branch structure within the branches so that they may be appreciated up close as one enters the home.

Pruning by Bruce Thompson. Used with Permission.

**EXAMPLE OF A HIGH LEVEL OF NOTE DETAIL AS REQUIRED FOR 5 TREES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO**





Hollywood juniper (*Juniperus chinensis* 'Torulosa') Berkeley, CA one pruning 2/22/10

- This was my first pruning of the tree and was a major structural pruning.
- Large thinning cuts were used to create negative spaces in the tree and to establish branch definition among the major branches.
- Reduced the tree in both height and width, as well as in visual mass, to establish proper scale and proportion.
- This is the start of a 5 year plan to develop the tree as a focal point with good branch transitions, nice ramification and well defined branchlets with detail that can be appreciated up close as one enters the home or from inside looking out the windows.
- Ultimately the lines, angles, movement and strength of the tree will match that of the home
- With the tree up against the southern side of the home, there are wonderful opportunities to continue to develop light and shadow play on the porch, wall and even inside the home via the windows.

Pruning by Bruce Thompson. Used with Permission.

**EXAMPLE OF A MODERATE LEVEL OF NOTE DETAIL AS REQUIRED FOR 10 TREES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO**



Pinus radiata (Monterey pine) Oakland, CA 5/10/06 - my first look



The same Monterey pine 11/9/07

See and feel how much happier the tree is in the second picture. It has a pleasing broad crown, nice normal looking pine branches with nice movement and the tree overall feels much more in balance. The pom-poms are gone, the weak lower branches are already much more vibrant, and the strong sunny side top has been reigned in.

This was a great restoration project done in 1½ years over the course of four prunings. The tree was there, it just needed to be brought back. It is 50+ years old, so I can't claim responsibility for the style and core framework- But I will take credit for seeing what needed to be done and having the courage to do it. The growing vigor of the top was killing off the lower branches and threatening to permanently destroy the structure of the tree. This was my very first pine client with the tree being the entire front yard along a busy street, and there were some big tough cuts to make at the top, so the pressure was on. Also, since the branches had been hedged for several years, they were a real mess of sprouts that required some skill to sort out. This tree has been a great teacher to me. To continue strengthening of the lowest tier of branches I prune them only every other year and leave the 2<sup>nd</sup> and even 3<sup>rd</sup> year needles as well. The heaviness this creates also adds a real visual weight to bottom of the tree which helps to balance out the large top and makes the tree feel strong and well rooted to the ground. (Notice that I also unpom-pommed the Irish moss as well to complete the transition to a more natural look.)

Pruning by Bruce Thompson. Used with Permission.

**EXAMPLE OF A HIGH LEVEL OF NOTE DETAIL AS REQUIRED FOR 5 TREES IN YOUR PORTFOLIO**



Pinus radiata (Monterey pine) Oakland, CA 5/10/06 - my first look



The same Monterey pine 11/9/07

- Restoration project done in 1½ years over the course of four prunings.
- Priority one was to balance the tree's energy, growth and appearance by reducing the strength of top and the sunny side while strengthening the weakness of the lower and back branches.
- The second priority was to restore some normal branch structure to the tree by undoing the previous poor pom-pom pruning.
- This was my very first pine client in my very first year of business and I feel proud that I had the vision, courage and knowledge to make some very tough cuts at the top of the tree.
- This tree has taught me many lessons over the years. One of the first ones was why you don't decandle a Monterey pine – I did that on my first pruning in May, and when I came back in the fall there were literally 20+ new buds growing back at the branch tips in the strongest areas. Talk about plenty of choices!