

# How to use loppers

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This card gives guidelines on how to introduce and use loppers safely with a group aged 4yrs and upwards.

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## 1. Preparation

**RISK ASSESSMENT** – Ensure you have read or created risk assessments for: site, activity, group.

**PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)** – Protective gloves for assistants, sturdy footwear.

**STAFF:** Appropriate training and experience, correct ratios for the age and nature of the group.

**SITE:** Set up an appropriate number of workstations for you to manage safely. Make sure that the workstations are an adequate distance away from each other. No pre-arranged set up, such as benches, is required for the use of loppers but it is important that each area has a safe clearance around it. You can position up to two working people around one workstation. Clear the site of any hazards. Allocate a position for the toolbox and safety equipment.

**TOOLS:** For each workstation one pair of loppers. Loppers should be stored in a box or bag in an allocated position near the workstations without causing a trip hazard.

**MATERIALS:** At least one 2m long branch per workstation with leaves and small branches left on.

## 2. Introduction

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Briefly introduce the tool giving its name and use. E.g. "These are loppers and we will be using them to remove small branches and twigs from this branch". Ensure whenever you hold the tool that you visually reiterate safe use by using correct holding and carrying techniques (see 'Transporting and passing' below).

## 3. Description

Visually and verbally describe the different parts of the loppers: shaft, handle, jaws and hinge. Never touch the jaws when demonstrating. Point to them from a distance asking the group why they should avoid touching them and how they could ensure they do this.

## 4. Transporting and passing

**It is important that the group goes through this structured process to build up gradual understanding, expected behaviours and respect for the tool.**

**a.) TRANSPORTING:** Hold one shaft in your right hand and the other in your left hand. Keeping hold of the loppers bring your right arm in to your right side bent with your elbow a little further back than your body. Your left arm will now cross in front of you keeping hold of the other shaft. The loppers should now be flat in to the right side of your body with the jaws facing forwards and the length of the loppers parallel to the ground. Your right hand holds the lower of the two shafts and your left hand, holds the upper. This will ensure that the loppers stay firmly closed when you are carrying them. Explain to the group that they can only move on to the next stage once they have demonstrated safe transporting of the tool. Each member demonstrates transporting the tool.

**b.) PASSING:** Holding one shaft in each hand, hold the loppers with the jaws pointing towards the ground. Offer the ends of the handles to the next person, only letting go when they hold both handles securely. Pointing the loppers down minimises the distance they will fall if dropped and allows easier access to the handles for the next person. They then accommodate the loppers as above, to carry them. Each member demonstrates passing the tool. **To promote this process consider having a reward (group clap, prize, token) for safe behaviour.**



## 5. Position and safety

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**a.) ALLOCATE ROLES** In pairs, with one tool per pair, allocate the roles of **controller** and **assistant**. The assistant can wear gloves.

**b.) POSITION PEOPLE** The controller finds a comfortable position next to the branch to be cut. The assistant stands close by but out of the working area. If necessary the assistant will help to move or stabilise the branch as the controller cuts.

## 6. Using the tool

**a.) DIAMETER** Demonstrate the diameter of cut that the group should make. This will depend on the capacity of the loppers and ability of the group. Start with thinner cuts approx 1cm diameter. When describing diameters never say "a stick the size of your finger" as this gives an unwanted cue to put fingers near the jaws to check.

**b.) IDENTIFY CUT** Ask the controller to identify any small branches or twigs of the correct diameter to be removed from the main branch.

**c.) CUTTING TECHNIQUE** Demonstrate technique. Always used away from the body, with hands on the handles. If the loppers are held further down the shaft, this will lessen leverage with the tool and make the process more difficult.

**d.) GROUP COMMUNICATION** The Controller starts cutting the identified branches. Once a couple have been cut they stop cutting, secure the loppers and then ask the assistant to remove the cut branches. Once the assistant is out of the work area the controller continues cutting.

**e.) SWAP ROLES** Swap the controller and assistant around and allow all members of the group to use the loppers.





## 6. Using the tool continued

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Cuts should be simple and fairly easy to perform. If a branch is too thick then it will be difficult to cut. This may cause the controller to apply excessive pressure. This could damage the tool and create frustration for the individual trying to cut, which could lead to an accident. Care should be taken that the controller keeps their body behind the lopper handles when cutting. If they are between the handles (demonstrated in photo) and the cut they are making resists, before suddenly cutting through, there is a risk of the controller injuring themselves with their own hands thumping in to their sides.

**PROGRESSION** When you feel that the group are confident and safe using the loppers you can begin to set them tasks of site improvement or preparation of materials.



- **Brashing** - Removal of lower branches of living trees to clear space
- **Snedding** - Cutting off branches from a fallen tree to use wood or tidy area
- **Pruning** - Cutting off side stems of young trees to prevent knot formation in later wood and to promote straight growth.
- **Use cut materials** to create: **habitat piles** - Pile the cut material to leave in the woodland for animals and insects to live in. **Building materials** - for filling in fences, dens or other constructions.
- **Specific lengths.** Using the loppers ask members of the group to cut thin branches to specific lengths to use for activities or games. Try cutting 1m lengths of thin green wood for whittling (see 'How to use a penknife safely') or short lengths for target games or lashing (see 'How to tie knots').

## 7. Storage and maintenance

Once the session has finished tools are returned to the toolbox. Tools should never be left lying on the floor or leant against trees when not being used. This prevents injury from people tripping or walking into tools and also prevents loppers being lost or forgotten. Ensure good transporting techniques are praised when returning loppers to the box. Before packing check all jaws and hinges are in good working order, wiped clean and moisture removed. Oil if necessary and ensure any damaged tools are labelled, removed or repaired.

## 8. Handy hints

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\***Consistency.** Keep your tool storage box in the same place for every session. This supports, through repetition, the need to pack loppers away when not in use.

\***Different loppers** do different jobs. It is a good idea to select the loppers most appropriate to the job.

'**Bypass loppers**' with a smooth edged blade passing another smooth edged blade to make the cut like scissors. **Ideal for green or wet wood.**

'**Anvil loppers**' with a single straight blade meeting a flat anvil base.

**Ideal for dead or dry wood.**

Some loppers also have a **gearing mechanism** which increases cutting power.

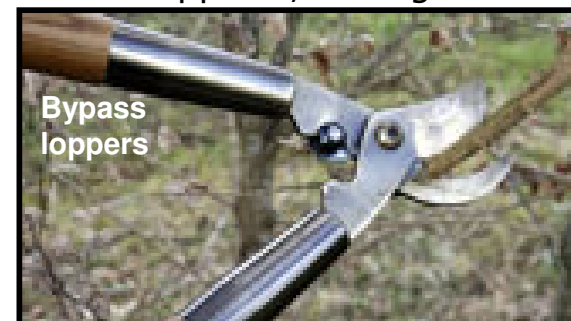
**Extending loppers** have a twist and extend function in their handles.

These give extra leverage and reach. But remember that when using loppers above head height a safety helmet should always be worn.

\***All cuts on live trees** should be made as clean and close to the trunk as possible to allow the tree the best chance to heal the wound. Cutting can be done at any time of the year. As a rule, growth is maximised and wound closure is fastest if pruning takes place before the spring growth flush.

\***Clearing spiky plants** such as brambles or low shrubs. If the plants to be cleared are prickly the assistants should use protective gloves to remove materials after the controller has cut.

\***Establishing expected behaviours:** Using tools inappropriately through either misunderstanding or messing about are the most likely causes of injury. It is therefore important that the group clearly understands all instructions and expected behaviours. A suggested consequence for anyone who intentionally misuses a tool is: they will be asked to put the tool down and sit out of the activity. When they are ready to behave appropriately they can request to join back in.



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