

NORTHERN Gardener

CREATING & CARING FOR YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Pruning

The novice gardener is often apprehensive about doing any pruning for fear of permanently damaging or killing recently purchased plants. In almost all cases more long term damage results from the lack of pruning than from any pruning that is done. Following a few simple rules should allay any apprehension you may have of pruning and help you to develop and maintain a more beautiful landscape.

WHY PRUNE? Pruning is done for a number of reasons including the following:

1. To remove broken, damaged or diseased branches.
2. To improve branching structure.
3. To thin the branching structure to renew and invigorate the remaining branches.
4. To promote fruit and flower production.
5. To rejuvenate older shrubs and evergreens.

CARING FOR YOUR ENVIRONMENT

- ✓ Consult with your nursery professional to select the right trees or shrubs for your particular needs. Trees and shrubs planted in the right place will thrive and need less pruning.

Evergreen Pruning

Proper selection of your evergreen tree or shrub should provide the basic size and shape of the plant that is desired. Pruning of evergreen trees should be minimal after the trees have become established.

Frequent and continuous pruning or shearing evergreen shrubs is necessary to maintain a specific form or formal appearance. The natural form of an evergreen is usually the most desirable, and pruning should be limited to correcting growth defects or maintaining its natural form unless it is being used in a hedge.



Do not cut the terminal leader of an evergreen tree unless it is extremely elongated.

Evergreens that grow continuously throughout the growing season can be pruned at almost any time except late in the growing season. Pruning after August can make the evergreen more susceptible to possible winter injury. Evergreens that grow continuously include



junipers, arborvitae, yews and hemlock.

Unless low-growing or spreading varieties are to be maintained as a hedge, it is preferable to selectively prune out branches if size control is required rather than to shear them into a globe or other geometric forms. If significant pruning is necessary for size control, consider replacing the plant with one of the proper natural size.

Pines, fir and spruce put on a single flush of growth in the spring and then stop. They must be pruned before the new growth, often referred to as candles, is fully expanded or becomes woody. This normally occurs in late June so pruning in early to mid June when the candles are about three-fourths elongated is preferable. Pruning at a later time can result in dead stubs. Up to one-half of the new growth can be removed if necessary. Pruning of pines is usually done only to promote dense, compact specimens.

Tree Pruning

Normally by the time you have purchased your tree it has already received any pruning that is needed for it to develop properly. For that reason any subsequent pruning is usually limited to removal of lower branches for clearance, removal of dead or diseased branches, pruning back branches that interfere with power lines. Pruning for changing the size and shape indicates an improper plant for that specific site.

Proper timing is important when pruning your tree. Most trees are best pruned in late winter or early spring while the tree is dormant in order to prevent the introduction or spread of disease. Oaks, honeylocust, apples, crabapples, pears, mountain-ash and hawthorn are varieties that are best pruned in early winter. Maples, honeylocusts,

birch, ironwood and elm will bleed if pruned in late winter or early spring. However the 'bleeding' is not considered to be detrimental to the tree.

The use of proper tools is important in doing a good job of pruning. Tools should be sharp and in good condition. Tools commonly used include pruning shears, lopping shears, pruning saws and occasionally a power saw. Power saw work is probably best left to the professional for safety reasons.

Figure 1 shows a diagram of the three steps to be used in removing a branch. Two simple rules to follow when removing a branch are do not leave a stub and do not cut into the branch collar as shown in figure 2.

Shrub Pruning

Proper timing is essential in most shrub pruning activities. As a rule, spring flowering shrubs should be pruned right after flowering. This enables the plant to develop new flowering buds for the next season. Summer flowering shrubs usually bloom off of new wood and are best pruned in the early spring before new growth starts. Spring or summer flowering shrubs can be pruned at

other times of the year, but they usually will not flower the next season. Shrubs grown primarily for their foliage are best pruned in early spring and can be pruned during the growing season as needed. It is usually best not to prune any shrub in late fall or early winter since it may make the plant more vulnerable to winter injury.

Rejuvenation pruning of shrubs should be done in the spring before growth starts. Many of the lower growing spireas and potentillas are examples of shrubs that benefit from rejuvenation pruning every one or two years. These plants should be pruned back to within 3 to 6 inches of the ground. Overgrown shrubs can be renewed by cutting approximately 1/3 of the oldest stems to the ground. This is especially beneficial to red or yellow stem dogwood shrubs which display the most color on young stems.



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