



Basic Pruning Principles

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1. REASONS FOR PRUNING:

To maintain or reduce size, but without being obvious

To remove broken, diseased or dead wood (which attract insects);

Sterilize tools between cuts when pruning diseased plants, (10% bleach solution and water, or <80% alcohol)

To rejuvenate shrubs (old lilacs, azaleas, viburnums & forsythias)

To maintain safety (remove eye-pokers & hair-pullers)

To enhance appearance by restricting and containing growth

To enhance the appearance of your landscape

To create a formalized silhouette as in topiary, espalier, hedge, or standard

2. CHOOSE THE RIGHT TOOLS:

- Pruners, scissor-action, will cut branches up to 1/4" diameter
- The use anvil-style clippers is not recommended; they squash, mash, and damage branch tissue
- Loppers-are pruners with long handles; can cut branches up to one inches in diameter (make sure you get the kind with "bumpers")
- Pruning saw-several kinds--make sure you use the right size for the Job, (the top-side of the saw can damage healthy tissue)
- Chainsaws are not recommended for any kind of pruning cuts
- Always wear gloves when handling and working with sharp tools

3. SOME RULES OF THUMB FOR PRUNING:

- Use only sharp and clean tools; select the right tools for the job; and handle properly
- Improve air circulation to reduce disease (leaf fungi such as Anthracnose, powdery mildew, and leaf galls).
- Remove competition: Branches growing into the same space compete for light and nutrients. Branches competing for the leader--remove what would be the weakest—if left alone, can create a weak crotch angle; can also affect the offshoots that come off the two leaders. Right-angled branches are the strongest.
- Too many branches emerging from same joint - weakens the tree
- Prune during the dormant period- October to February

4. PRUNING SPECIFICS--Evergreen shrubs:

- Remove dead and damaged branches any time of the year except in the coldest days in the winter when cold and wind would damage the plant.
- Trimming or hedge clipping should be done in March or late February after the coldest days have already passed so that the interior of the plant does not get damaged from winds and cold, causing bark-splitting, etc.
- Do not prune or trim after the 1st of July because the pruning will stimulate new growth which will not harden-off by the winter time.

5. BLOOM SEASON (spring flowering versus summer flowering):

- Trees and shrubs that bloom before the 1st of June should be pruned right after the flowers have faded, (azaleas, forsythias)
- Those that bloom after the 1st of June can be pruned when the cold weather ends in late winter, (roses, crape myrtles)
- Deadheading - Although not mandatory, you can remove faded flowers to prevent energy-sapping seed production

6. HOW MUCH TO PRUNE?

- Never cut more than one third of the growth in once season
- Do not cut roots off during active root growth, (fall and spring)
- Stems and shoots grow in the summer-- it's best not to prune when trees are in active growth.
- The worst time to prune is in the middle of spring. Tree bark is more pliant during this period, and more susceptible to die-back at the tree cut wound; also serves as entry point for disease and insects.

7. PRUNING TERMINOLOGIES:

- Dead wooding; elevating the canopy
- Crown reduction -drop-crotch pruning
- 3 point cut (the undercut prevents bark tear, the most serious wound)
- Trimming, (shearing)
- Suckers/water sprouts
- Subordination & scaffolding
- Practices not recommended:
 - topping
 - wound dressings and paints
 - flush cutting
 - missing the target (don't leave a stub & don't flush-cut)
 - nicking or wounding by accident
 - don't stub cut or head back or hack back

**REMEMBER: THERE'S NEVER A GOOD TIME TO MESS UP A TREE FOREVER
USE ONLY PROPER PRUNING CUTS--CUT ONLY THE BRANCH TISSUE, NOT
THE BRANCH COLLAR--CUT SO AS NOT TO TEAR THE BARK--USE THE
PROPER TOOLS**