

# The Artistry of Pruning

The most common calls we receive on the horticulture hotline during the fall and winter months are those regarding pruning. As we are just now approaching the most appropriate time of year for pruning trees and shrubs, we decided to launch a little how-to on the subject.

With the exception of flowering trees and shrubs, most should be pruned in late winter/early spring while the plant is still dormant but after the worst of our cold weather. As a rule of thumb, flowering trees and shrubs can be placed in two categories: 1) Those that bloom before the end of May should be pruned just after flowering as they produce next years flower buds the year before and 2) Those that bloom after June 1 should be pruned in the spring just before flower buds are visible. Trees and shrubs are able to restore themselves more rapidly when proper pruning times are observed. Some trees may bleed when pruned this time of year, but this loss of sap will not harm the tree. Dead, diseased, or broken branches may be pruned at any time of year, but late winter pruning includes that done to greatly reduce size, maintain size, shape, encourage new growth, and rejuvenate plants. It is not healthy for plants to have more than 1/3 of their growth pruned off at a time. If proper pruning is done annually and plant selection has been appropriate to the location, severe pruning will never be necessary. Cuts should be made at a 45 degree angle with a clean, sharp instrument. Care must be made not to cut into the branch collar - the swollen bark around the base of a branch. This is the tree's healing mechanism and will allow the tree to reseal the wound and compartmentalize any decay. Make your cut directly above the branch collar without leaving a stub. When making a cut mid-branch, cut ¼ inch beyond a leaf bud.

<b>Pruning Dos</b>	<b>Pruning Don'ts</b>
Do remove one of two branches forming tight forks. If left, these branches will be very weak and one will eventually fall.	<b>Don't</b> paint wounds. Wound paints do not stop decay or seal out moisture.
Do remove branches that are potential hazards, such as low hanging branches over roads and houses.	<b>Don't</b> remove the central leader or central stem. Many trees naturally grow a central leader and will produce a weaker one in its place.
Do prune out dead, dying or diseased branches. Any time of year.	<b>Don't</b> ever top trees. This is not a rejuvenation process! Trees will not be able to heal the wounds, and decay will soon take over the tree.
Do remove any branches that cross or rub against other branches.	<b>Don't</b> use shears on evergreens. The repeated use of shears on evergreen hedges produce a green exterior with a dead,

	unsightly interior.
Do remove watersprouts. These are weak, straight branches that grow vertically. They drain nutrients and ruin shape and should be removed from their point of origin.	Don't prune in early fall or spring leaf out. In the fall, it produces late growth which in turn is very cold sensitive. In the spring, he plants need that energy for leaf production.
Do feel free to give evergreen shrubs a second, light pruning in June.	Don't ever leave a large branch stub when pruning. This allows entry for diseases and decay.
Do prune pines just above the needle whorles	Don't cut too far back into the older wood on evergreens. New growth is not readily produced from such wood.
Do prune mahonia and leucothoe after the plants bloom in the spring. No winter pruning is necessary.	Don't do much pruning on rhododendron, azalea, pieris, or mountain laurel. These plants are slow growing and should only require the removal of dead or dying branches.