

10 TIPS BEFORE YOU PRUNE

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With the colder temperatures of winter behind us, eager gardeners are anxious to get outside to ready the garden for a new season of growth.

Rather than considering pruning as an exercise to ‘tidy up’ your trees and shrubs, think of it as a way to invigorate healthy new growth and before taking your pruners and enthusiasm out on your plants subjects, here are some points to remember:

1. Always prune with disinfected tools. Bleach can corrode your equipment, but Lysol or Listerine can be used full strength to guard against spreading diseases from plant to plant.
2. Remove dead and diseased stems. Cut back weak wood and branches that cross and are rubbing against other branches.
3. Although azaleas and rhododendrons should rarely need pruning, if you must trim them back for space reasons, do so **after** blooms fade.
4. Spring flowering shrubs such as Forsythia and Japanese Flowering Quince (*Chaenomeles japonica*) benefit from occasional pruning to reinvigorate them – just after flowering.
5. Summer flowering shrubs that bloom after June do so on current season’s growth, so prune back in early spring to promote vigorous growth. Crape Myrtles (*Lagerstroemia indica*) and Rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*) fall into this category. Shrubs such as the Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia davidii*), Russian Sage (*Perovskia atriplicifolia*) and Caryopteris can be cut back really hard to within 6 inches of the ground.
6. Don’t be tempted to prune your mophead hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) back hard. These are plants that bloom on last summer’s growth and if you prune them now, you could be removing all potential flowering buds. When new growth starts in the spring, cut dead-looking wood back to the nearest live-looking bud.
7. When it comes to conifers, yew, arborvitae, cypress and junipers can form new growth on any part of the plant. However, needle leaved evergreens such as pines, spruces and firs generally do not produce new growth from old wood. Don’t be tempted to cut back past the living foliage.
8. Prune hybrid roses from mid March. The old adage is roses are pruned when the forsythia blooms. Prune so that the center is open with 3-5 healthy canes. Cut back to a vigorous bud choosing a bud that is pointing in the direction you wish

- new growth to take. Remove suckers, woody canes and twiggy canes. Prune rambler and climbing roses after flowering.
9. NO TOPPING! Cutting back branches at the crown of a tree severely causes many problems. This practice not only disfigures the tree but can shorten its life by making it more susceptible to attack from insects and diseases. Topping also encourages rapid, weak, vertical growth called 'water sprouts' liable to break off during severe wind or rain storms, and requiring further pruning sooner than desired.
 10. Finally, to minimize pruning tasks, when selecting a tree or shrub to plant, carefully consider where it is to be located in your garden and choose one that will fit the space, even in 20 years time.

For further information on pruning techniques and timing, check out the Virginia Tech – Virginia Cooperative Extension Service website: <http://www.ext.vt.edu/>

For free advice on your gardening problems, contact Fairfax County Master Gardeners:
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