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All About Pruning - When, How and most importantly, Why

Are you afraid of pruning?

Pruning is one of the best things you can do for your plants, if it done the right way.

After today you will be able to understand the process.

Learn exactly when, how and why to prune various plants. (AND WHY NOT)

Know methods of using pruning tools & equipment

Reasons to Prune - Pruning with a purpose

1. When planting or transplanting
2. To train
3. To control size, appearance and health
4. To control production of fruit & flowers
5. To rejuvenate
6. To create a barrier

Always have a purpose in mind

1. Removal of diseased plant parts
2. Removal of damaged plant parts
3. To create a barrier, hedge or screen
4. To assure a plentiful harvest
5. To create a healthy, beautiful shape
6. To train an espalier or bonsai

Tree Anatomy

- Trunk
- Scaffold branches
- Lateral branches
- Spurs (on fruit trees)
- Water sprouts (vertical growth from horizontal branches)
- Sucker growth (from ground and at base of trunks)

Pruning for appearance and Pruning for health

Tools

- Pruning shears (hand held)
- Lopping shears – bypass vs. anvil
- Pruning saws
- Chain saws (only for professionals)

Tree Paints and Sealers (old school – not recommended now)

Pruning Methods

- A proper pruning cut
- When to prune
- Training
- Shearing
- Removing large limbs

When to Prune

- Best when the plant is dormant or just before an active growth period (March)

- Late-winter (when temps are above freezing)
- Spring (Summer flowering plants)
- Early summer (Spring bloomers)
- Late summer (Nothing)
- Fall (after first frost)

Most people face pruning for the first time when pruning an overgrown shrub

1. **Pruning dormant shrubs**

Examples of maintenance pruning cuts

- (1) Problem 1 – crossed branches
- (2) Problem 2 – sucker growth from base of plant
- (3) Problem 3 – weak crotches that collect water & debris

2. **Evergreen pruning**

- (1) Needled evergreen anatomy
- (2) Terminal buds- fat, brown buds that were formed the preceeding year.
- (3) Dormant lateral buds –thousands of nearly invisible smaller buds that develop in twigs and branches –shearing or pruning stimulates them

3. **Transforming from formal to natural style** – pruning to “open up”

4. **How to Shear**

- (1) Controlled growth – allow “candles” to grow 2-4”, then pinch or clip off tips
- (2) Maintain existing size – let “candles” grow to only 1”, then shear off completely

5. **Shearing Screens**

- (1) Clip the top and sides each year for the first 2 –3 years
- (2) This will help the plants to grow in a tight pattern and close to the ground
- (3) Keep the sides sheared so the width will be manageable
- (4) Make sure the top is never wider than the lower part
- (5) Don’t shear off the top and ignore the sides, soon it becomes irregular and too wide
- (6) Put up posts and string to use as a guide when shearing long, straight, formal hedges
- (7) Always shear so that the bottom is wider than the top, it is barely noticeable but extremely important to preserve the bottom branches

Hedge shapes

(A) Box effect – good where snow loads are not heavy **(B)** Sides are too straight **(C, D, E)** Suited to areas with heavy snows **(F)** Untrimmed hedge **(G)** The top is too wide, making this undesirable – sun can not reach the bottom and snow will crush the top **(H)** The canopy hedge is suited to sunny climates with mild winters

Pruning roses

- Roses are flowering shrubs
- Flowering occurs more on “new wood”
- By pruning old wood out, new wood is encouraged
- More flowers are produced
- Pruning is “managing your crop”

Complete Rose Plant Maintenance Overview

- Rose Pruning Objectives – open the center and prune to 8 to 12 inches April 15th
- Bad – too congested Good – center opened
- Spring Pruning
- Fall Pruning
- Pruning Hybrid Tea, Grandiflora, Floribunda

Pruning Tree Roses – treat the grafted part like a Hybrid Tea that is growing out of the ground

Climbing Roses

- Climbers look better if you allow a few tall branches to grow to the top of the trellis
- Remove weak canes so that the strength goes into a few canes
- Steer some of the new canes to grow outward to cover the trellis early
- Tie the stems to the trellis with strips of cloth
- In spring cut $\frac{1}{4}$ of length of all branches to promote heavier flowering
- Cut out branches that are growing too thick. Every 3 years cut out older canes and allow new ones to replace them

Fruit Trees - Reasons for pruning fruit trees:

1. To get the tree off to a good start
2. To encourage good crops of quality fruit
3. To manage your tree's size
4. To keep your tree healthy
5. To repair a tree that hasn't been pruned properly or not at all!
6. A neglected tree is likely to produce only biennially and the fruits will be small
7. A well-pruned tree bears annually over all its branches and can support the weight of a moderate –sized harvest
8. Prune lightly to shape the tree during the first years of life – snip and pinch here and there
9. Heavy pruning can delay the tree's first crop, so prune just enough to shape it
10. In later years cut more aggressively aiming for one of three forms:
 - (1) Central leader – best for heavy crops of large fruit
 - (2) Modified leader – easiest to maintain, natural form
 - (3) Open center AKA Open-top or Vase – for lightweight fruits
11. Fruit Tree Pruning Principles
 - Train the young tree to grow in a spreading shape
 - Avoid too many branches close to the ground
 - Keep in mind an image of the mature tree whenever clipping or snipping
 - Prune in accordance with the tree's natural growth habit
 - Thin! Keep the branches sparse enough for fruit to get enough sunlight to ripen.

Happy Pruning!