

It's time to think about *Pruning Shrubs and Trees*

(taken from an article - <https://extension.psu.edu/pruning-shrubs-and-trees>)

With spring on the doorstep, now is an excellent time to prune some of our shrubs and trees.

Pruning manages the size and shape of a tree or shrub, and is used to remove dead, damaged and diseased branches, suckers and crossing branches that rub together.

In addition to improving a plant's appearance, correct pruning promotes plant health and encourages flower and fruit development. Additionally, pruning hazardous trees protects you and your property. Here are some tips to follow when pruning specific plants, the best tools to use and some basic techniques.

Late winter

Late winter, while plants are still dormant, is the ideal time for pruning many trees and shrubs. One reason is that many of the pests and diseases that often infect trees via fresh pruning wounds are also dormant. Another is that you can see the structure of a deciduous plant before leaves obscure it. Prune apple trees, flowering crabapples and cotoneasters now to reduce the chance of the bacterial disease, fire blight. Also prune maple, birch and walnut trees now as they have free flowing sap that 'bleeds' when they are no longer dormant. It is important to prune oak, especially trees in the red oak group, while they are dormant to prevent insects from entering pruning wounds and transmitting oak wilt.

Early spring

Prune summer and fall flowering shrubs in early spring before buds break and the plants leaf out. These are shrubs that "bloom on new wood," or the current season's growth. They include sweetshrub, beautyberry, summersweet, bush honeysuckle, smooth hydrangea, PeeGee hydrangea, summer-blooming spirea and repeat-blooming roses (*Rosa* spp. and hybrids.)

Pruning equipment

Equipment includes hand-held pruners, long-handled lopping shears, hedge shears, a pruning saw and a bow saw. Use the hand pruners on branches up to one-half inch diameter. A bypass (scissor action) hand pruner is preferred for close-cut precision. Use the lopping shears on branches one-half to one-inch in diameter and a bow saw for larger branches. The pruning saw is invaluable where the bow saw will not fit. You will need hedge shears for shearing shrubs into formal shapes; do not use hedge shears on trees. It is important to keep your tools sharp. When you use the bleach solution for sanitization, oil the blades afterward to prevent rusting.

Basic techniques

Remove dead, damaged, diseased or insect-infected branches first, then branches that are rubbing together.

To shorten a small branch or twig, make the cut about ¼ inch above a bud, facing the outside of the plant so the new branch will grow in that direction.

For large branches make three or four cuts to avoid tearing the bark. Starting about 18 inches from the trunk, make the first cut on the underside of the branch cutting half way through. Make the second cut an inch further out on top, cutting down until the branch breaks free. This eliminates the weight of the branch before making the third cut close to the trunk. The final cut will sever the remaining part of the branch from the main stem at the branch collar. Be careful to remove only the wood beyond the collar. The branch collar should be left intact but with no stub if the wound is to seal effectively without decay.

Research shows that pruning paints are not necessary.

When pruning hedges, shear the sides so the top is narrower than the base to allow the plant to get enough light.

Overgrown shrubs such as forsythia and lilac may need renewal pruning: remove a third of the oldest stems or trunks right down to the ground to encourage the growth of new stems.

You can rejuvenate badly overgrown flowering shrubs by cutting all stems back to the ground in early spring. The shrub will not flower that year but will return to its normal size and shape in one growing season.

It is too early to do many gardening tasks, but it is a good time to check your shrubs and trees and begin to implement your pruning plan. Following these few basic tips can help you achieve a more beautiful landscape.