

Dormant Pruning

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Late winter and into early spring is the ideal time for dormant pruning of woody ornamentals, but before you grab your tools and attack the nearest tree or shrub there are some basic philosophies, procedures and practices you should consider.

When discussing pruning in a brief article, one must remember there are exceptions to every rule and there is considerably more information available about pruning than I can present in this article. Here are some of my general pruning concepts and techniques.

A combination of knowledge and skills is required to become a successful pruner. An artist's touch plays just as important a role as scientific knowledge of the plant material. Having a good eye for balance and symmetry plus the ability to envision the mature specimen in its future surroundings all contribute to your success as in stone shaping, the final desired shape exists within the original form of the stone you are carving. By removing pieces of that stone you achieve the end result; an aesthetically pleasing, structurally sound work of art.

Work with a goal of excellence and a good attitude, you are now ready for the scientific aspects of pruning.

First is the timing. Most woody ornamentals can be pruned in their dormant season, but remember that pruning promotes growth. Be careful of above normal temperatures and to avoid pruning when it's unusually warm. Pruning below 32 degrees F can also cause problems. Because the wood is frozen, some splitting and cracking may occur. Avoid pruning plants that flower in early spring. These plants flower on old wood and you will be removing this year's flowers. You will not harm these early flowering plants, but you will reduce the quantity of the blooms for this year. Besides late winter being the appropriate time for dormant pruning, it is also a time when little else is happening with other plant material projects.

There are several styles of pruning depending on the desired affect, but here are some basic rules that will apply to any pruning endeavor. First, determine the natural shape of the plant and whether or not you will be trying to maintain its' natural beauty. I will warn you though, trying to alter a plants natural growth habit requires more time and energy than simply trying to en-

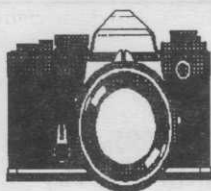
hance its' natural shape. Secondly, establish a plan of action. For example, does the tree need to be limbed up? Are there any major branches that need to be removed? Will you need a ladder, pole pruner, etc? Come prepared and have clear procedure that you will follow

With your tools of choice, began by removing the three "D's"; dead, diseased, and damaged limbs. Next look for any crossing or structurally weak branches and remove these.

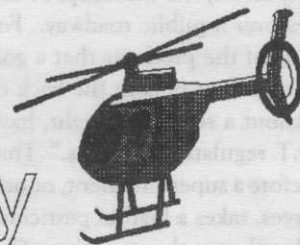
Several things to keep in mind are to always wake quality cuts, take your time and inspect your work by stepping back and moving around the plant as often as possible. Remove large branches one piece at a time, starting at the tip so you remove only as much as is necessary. Radical or severe pruning should be done in stages; one third each year for three years.

Lastly, if you are not sure about removing certain branches, leave them for next year. Don't hurry! Pruning should not be rushed unless personal safety or the health of the plant is at stake.

In conclusion, I hope these basic tips on pruning will increase your confidence and skill level when sculpting your collection of woody ornamentals



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