

Pruning Do's and Don'ts

Pruning can be a very intimidating process for most homeowners. Let's take away some of the causes of that fear. A common misconception is pruning is a dwarfing process to a particular plant. While this is temporarily true, pruning actually increases the amount of growth to any plant pruned. Prune one branch, and the remainder of that branch will put on two or more new branches. That's good to know when you have young plants you want to be thicker, quicker.

Pruning is also necessary to maintain the overall size and shape of our trees and shrubs. Pruning can also give re-birth to our older deciduous shrubs that have all their leaves on the upper half leaving the bottom of the plant leafless and leggy. Probably the biggest reason we prune is we have the wrong plant growing in the wrong place. We fail to get the proper information on how much a particular plant will grow and how much room it will need. No tree or shrub ever stops growing until the day it dies. Tags, labels, and signs identifying various plants will state how high and wide a particular plant will grow (ex. – Dwarf Korean Lilac grows 5 feet tall and 5 feet wide). The truth is, once that Lilac reaches that size, you will have to continue to prune yearly to keep it at that size. The size a plant is labeled to grow is the average size you can maintain that plant by pruning, not that a plant will reach a certain size and stop growing.

You can put all flowering trees and shrubs into two categories; those that bloom in the spring and those that bloom in the summer. The majority of spring flowering trees and shrubs form their bloom buds the previous late summer or fall. Prune any these spring bloomers before they bloom in the spring and guess what, there goes all that color. Summer flowering trees and shrubs get their bloom buds on the new growth that grows in the spring. The old growth on those can be pruned in the spring.

To be completely bloom safe, wait to prune any tree or shrub until after it blooms. Whether the bloom comes in the spring or summer, you will have six weeks to prune after that year's bloom and not affect the next year's bloom.

Re-Birthing that Old Shrub

Planted for ten years or more, flowering shrubs like forsythia, honeysuckle, all viburnums, and others start to show their age. They don't flower as much as they once did and have leaves only on the upper half. After a flowering shrub has finished blooming, you can prune all the branches back to 12 to 18 inches from the ground. Within four weeks after this radical pruning, you will see all kinds of new growth appearing and your old shrubs will look brand new. You can expect several feet of new growth this season. The best pruning tool to use in the re-birthing process is a lopping shear that you can buy or rent.

Other great pruning tools are hand pruners, a folding pruning saw, and hedge shear, although the latter should be used carefully as to not prune too much in one motion.

One Last Tip

Find some room to plant a Forsythia shrub. Every landscape should include at least one golden blooming plant that tells everyone in your neighborhood spring is here. There are many varieties that grow to different sizes so I know there's one out there that has your name on it.