

Pruning Trees

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October 12, 2015

Starting now is a good time to start pruning deciduous trees. As the tree grows this spring, it will start to heal itself. I think it is most important to prune only that which is needed. This includes dead wood and broken branches. In addition, diseased branches should be trimmed such as Fire Blight in apple trees. Remember when cutting diseased branches from trees to wash the saw blade off between each cut with a mild solution of Clorox such as 1 pint/10 pints water, or other disinfectant. Clorox can be very corrosive to tools, so you need to oil them from time to time. This will help from spreading disease to other parts of the tree and to other trees. Also, prune branches that are too close to houses, power lines, and sidewalks. In addition, any branches that are growing into or interfering with other branches should be pruned out. When pruning, be sure to prune down to live wood, preferably where the branch forks or connects to the tree.

Always cut close to the trunk or branch but not into the collar. The collar is the growth area where two branches meet or a branch and the trunk meet. This area is sometimes larger or darker than the rest of the branch. This is the area of the tree that naturally heals itself. Therefore, we do not want to damage this area. After you have made a cut, do not put anything on the cut such as tar or paint, as this will interfere with the healing process. You could use a fungicide on the cut area especially if you are pruning a cottonwood, aspen or poplar type of tree since these are more susceptible to diseases.

Homeowners often hesitate to prune evergreens because they are unsure of the proper pruning method. A little selective pruning, from the time an evergreen is young, can help control the tree's size, thicken its growth, and improve its shape. Proper pruning time and method is determined by the growth pattern of the tree. There are three kinds: 1] pines, 2] spruce and fir, and 3] juniper.

Pines should be pruned in late spring during the "candle" stage. This is when the spurt of new growth on the branch tips is completed but before the needles spread and the new wood starts to harden. You can shorten new growth by cutting one-half of the candles off at an angle. New buds will form on the remaining stub to become next year's new candles. If you remove dead or damaged branches from the tree, do this pruning before new growth starts.

Spruces and firs should be pruned in late fall to early spring - before new growth begins. On these trees, you can see buds along the twigs of last season's growth. Cut about one-half of those twigs off, about 1/4" above a healthy-looking bud. This bud will grow as the next candle.

Dead or damaged branches can be removed at this same time of year. This also works to ensure only one terminal leader, instead of several.

Junipers can be pruned any time the wood is not frozen. Early spring is advised because new growth will quickly hide the cuts. These trees and shrubs can grow new shoots from any branch that has green needles, so they can be heavily pruned and shaped without permanent damage.

Pines, spruces and firs are easier to damage with careless pruning. They grow new shoots only from last year's twigs. If the entire twig is removed, there will be no further growth on that branch. If the pruning is not done at the right time to stimulate the buds, they will refuse to begin new twigs. If you miss the proper pruning time, it will be best if you wait until the next season unless the pruning is necessary for safety reasons.

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