

Pruning Ornamental Plants

Mary Jane Frogge
UNL Extension Associate

March through May is the best time for pruning trees, junipers and flowering shrubs. Leaves are gone from the deciduous plants so we can see the branching structure and determine where cuts should be made. Healing occurs most rapidly when growth is starting in the spring, so wounds caused by pruning are quickly healed.

Annual, light pruning is better than occasional, heavy pruning—it is easier on the plant and easier on the pruner. It is also easier on the pocketbook if we hire the work done. Size, shape and health of plants can be maintained by annual, light pruning if we start when plants are small and follow our pruning program faithfully.

If trees or specimen shrubs have grown too large or too full and heavy pruning is necessary, do the work in two or three annual steps. Again, it is easier on the plant, pruner and/or the pocketbook.

Early flowering shrubs (spiraea, lilac, forsythia, mock orange, shrub roses, flowering plums, flowering quince, and flowering cherries) are best pruned immediately after they flower. Flower buds of these plants develop late in the summer and open the following year. Spring pruning would

remove many of the flower buds before they have a chance to bloom.

Basic Requirements for Pruning

The common sense and safety requirement is most important. Pruning tools, sharp sticks, stumps and dropping limbs are dangerous. The person pruning must be alert for his own safety and of others. Plants can produce a new limb but people cannot.

Use tools that fit the job. Hand pruners for branches up to three-fourth inch in diameter, lopping shears for those up to one-inch and saws for anything larger. Sharp tools are a must. Use a small file to touch up cutting blades after every 5 to 10 cuts. Clean, smooth cuts can then be made easily and they will heal quickly.

Make cuts close to the trunk or branch which is being left, but avoid a scalloping cut. Stripping of bark and splitting can be avoided by undercutting any branch that is large enough to require sawing and placing the cutting edges of the pruners against the under side of smaller branches to be cut.

Look ahead, but be decisive. First, remove all dead, broken, diseased or crisscrossing branches. Starting from that point, consider the size, form and density you desire. Remove stems and branches that do not

contribute to the mental image. Try to anticipate the change that will occur when a particular cut is made then make the cut. Remember a plant can soon cover up most pruning errors.

Pruning Systems

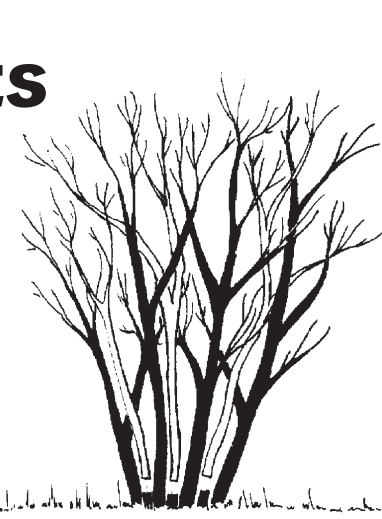
It is difficult to improve on the natural shape of a plant, so it is recommended size reduction through two pruning systems that retain the original form of the tree or shrubs.

For specimen shrubs and natural form hedges:

Annually remove about a third of the oldest, tallest stems plus weak sucker shoots and a third of the strong new shoots. Leave strong new shoots that are within the size and shape limits desired. This approach will insure an adequate supply of young, healthy flowering stems and yet keep the size of the plant within bounds. This system works with red or yellow twig dogwood, lilacs, flowering almond, mock orange, forsythia, deutzia, viburnums, cotoneasters, spiraea and privet.

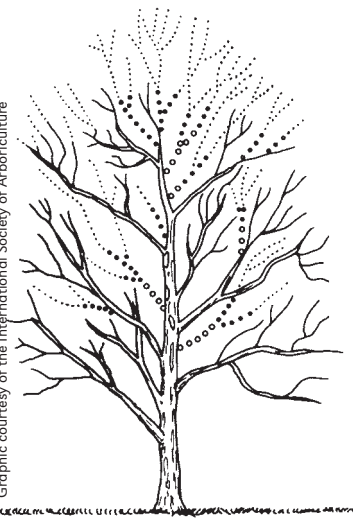
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Graphic courtesy of MU Extension, University of Missouri-Columbia

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Graphic courtesy of the International Society of Arboriculture

For evergreen shrubs, small trees and shade trees: prune over-size branches back to a smaller branch growing in the same general direction as the part removed.

tion as the part removed. This procedure, called "drop crotching," effectively reduces height and spread without changing the form of the plant. Plants for this system include:

Spreaders: spreading or horizontal junipers, yews

Uprights: yews, boxwood, eastern red cedar

Deciduous trees: tree cotoneasters, tree euonymus, flowering crabs, mountain ash, redbud, golden rain tree, hawthorn, tree lilac, green ash, hackberry, elms, linden, cottonwood, maple, birch, oaks, nut trees and locust

Renovation

If a deciduous hedge has grown too large and leggy, cut the hedge to the ground and shape the new growth devel-

oping from the crowns of the plants. Shaping can be done by shearing or by selective pruning when the new growth is 10 to 15 inches tall. The base of the hedge should be kept wider than the top. Allow about 3 years to regenerate a 3 to 4 foot hedge of cotoneaster or privet.

Specimens of finely branched shrubs which are very overgrown can be handled as described for a hedge. Cut to the ground line after plants go dormant and reconstruct the plant using new growth from the crown. Spiraea, little leaf mock orange, shrub roses and flowering quince are some examples. You will lose one or two years of flowering when this approach is used.

Source: Roger Uhlinger

Garden Guide

THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH
By Mary Jane Frogge, UNL Extension Associate

Be sure not to store apples or pears with vegetables. The fruits give off ethylene gas which speeds up the breakdown of vegetables and will cause them to develop off-flavors.

African violets do well when potted in small pots. A good general rule is to use a pot one-third the diameter of the plant. Encourage African violets to bloom by giving them plenty of light. They can be in a south window during dark winter months. They bloom beautifully under fluorescent lights.

After the ground freezes, mulch small fruit plants such as strawberries. One-inch of straw or leaves is ideal for strawberries.

Remove all mummified fruit from fruit trees, rake up and destroy those on the ground. Also, rake and dispose of apple and cherry leaves. Good sanitation practices reduce reinfestation of insects and diseases the following season.

Clean power tools of all plant material and dirt. Replace worn spark plugs, oil all necessary parts, and sharpen blades. Store all tools in their proper place indoors, never outdoors where they will rust over the winter.

Clean and fix all hand tools. Repaint handles or identification marks that have faded over the summer. Sharpen all blades and remove any rust.

Order seed catalogs now for garden planning in January. For variety, consider companies specializing in old and rare varieties of wild flowers.

Bring out the bird feeders and stock them with bird seed. Remember to provide fresh water for the birds too.

Place Christmas trees away from fireplaces, radiators, heat vents or anything else that could dry the needles. Keep your Christmas tree well watered from the time it is brought home until it is discarded.

Minimize traffic on a frozen lawn to reduce winter damage.

Inspect trees and shrubs for bagworm capsules. Remove and destroy them to reduce next year's pest population.

House plants with large leaves and smooth foliage such as philodendrons, dracaena and rubber plant, benefit if their leaves are washed with a damp cloth to remove dust.

A home weather station that includes a minimum-maximum thermometer, a rain gauge and a weather log is a good gift for a gardener.

Start reviewing your garden notes to help with next year's plans.

Check fruits, vegetables, corms and tubers you have in storage. Sort out any showing signs of rot and dispose of them.

Spark Up the Fireplace with Color

Gathering around a warm, cozy fireplace can be a treat on cold, blustery winter evenings. For additional enjoyment, a variety of festive colors can be enjoyed by treating fireplace logs with various chemicals. Evergreen cones, corncobs, small blocks of wood, rolled newspaper or sawdust also can be easily treated and used for fireplace fuel.

Most of these chemicals can be found in a grocery or dry goods stores. Epsom salts, borax and calcium chloride may be found in the laundry or cleaning supply sections. Potassium chloride is used as a salt substitute and may be found in the spice section. Look for copper sulfate where swimming pool supplies are sold. Less common chemicals, such as copper chloride, might be found in a drug store or chemical supply store. Others, such as strontium chloride, can be obtained from businesses specializing in fireworks or rocketry supplies.

The chemical colorant should be completely dissolved in water before treatment. For powdered or granular colorants, stir in the colorant until

Flame color	Chemical to make the color
White	magnesium sulfate (Epsom salts)
Crimson	lithium chloride
Red	strontium chloride
Orange	calcium chloride (bleaching powder)
Yellow-orange	baking soda
Yellow	sodium chloride (table salt)
Yellow-green	borax
Bright green	powdered boric acid
Green	copper sulfate
Blue	copper chloride
Purple	potassium chloride (salt substitute)
Violet	three parts potassium sulfate, one part potassium nitrate (salt peter)

no more will dissolve (roughly 1 part chemical to 3 parts water). Warm water may help dissolve the colorant. Soak the fuel material for a day or more and allow the fuel to dry before burning. It is recommended a wooden, earthen or plastic container be used for mixing and soaking, as metal containers may be damaged by some of the chemicals. Fuels to be treated may be placed in a mesh or porous bag, weighted down and submerged in the solution.

If handled properly, these chemicals are not dangerous to work with or burn. However, a few precautions should be

taken:

- Wear rubber gloves when handling chemicals.
- Prepare only as much coloring solution as needed at one time and do the work outside.
- Store chemicals in tightly sealed containers away from children and pets.
- Burn treated fuels only after the fire has a good start and developed a healthy draft.
- Do not use treated fuels for cooking food.
- Burn treated fuels only in a standard fireplace, not in a wood stove.

Source: Dennis Adams, Nebraska Forest Service

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