

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

	University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment <i>Cooperative Extension Service</i>
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Pruning Shrubs and Trees for Several Reasons
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Remember the pruners that are clean and put away? The time is near to use them properly.

The flowering period of an ornamental shrub or tree is a way to determine when to prune them. For example, shrubs that flower before the end of May should be pruned during or immediately after flowering. The flowers are formed on wood from the previous summer. By pruning them right after they bloom, maximum time is allowed before winter to develop the wood for next season's flowers. If pruned during the winter or before flowering in the spring, flower buds are removed, and blossoms are reduced or eliminated for the coming season.

Some of the shrubs that flower early are flowering quince, cornelian cherry, deutzia, forsythia, holly, mountain laurel, honeysuckle, magnolia, mock orange, firethorn, hawthorn, azalea and rhododendron, black jetbead, thunberg spirea, bridalwreath spirea, Japanese snowball, common lilac, Chinese lilac, French lilac, and viburnum.

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Shrubs that flower after the end of May should be pruned in the winter or spring before new growth begins. They bloom on wood formed during the current spring or summer.

Examples of summer-flowering shrubs are five-leaf aralia, glossy abelia, butterflybush, beautyberry, summersweet clethra, rose of Sharon, hills of snow hydrangea, peegee hydrangea, oakleaf hydrangea, crape myrtle, and hybrid tea rose.

Certain shrubs may be pruned lightly before and after flowering. This often increases flowering and fruit production and may result in a second bloom during the year. Examples of this group include glossy abelia, butterflybush, red twig dogwood, spreading cotoneaster, multiflora cotoneaster, Oregon hollygrape, Anthony waterer spirea, Froebel spirea, snowberry, and wiegela.

Ornamental trees that flower before the end of May should be pruned immediately after flowering. These include redbud, magnolia, flowering dogwood, hawthorn, crabapple, flowering cherry, flowering pear, flowering plum, horse chestnut, buckeye, serviceberry, fringetree, silverbell, witchhazel, holly, and chestnut.

Ornamental trees that flower after the end of May should be pruned in winter or spring before new growth or budbreak begins. These include golden rain tree, mimosa, Japanese pagodatree, sourwood, and other late-flowering trees.

Some trees, such as birch, yellowwood, elm, pine, spruce, fir, and maple, may bleed excessively if pruned in late winter to spring. Bleeding or loss of sap will not harm the tree but may be unsightly or messy. Bleeding may be reduced by pruning such trees when they are in full leaf which would be in June.

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For the health of the plant, the proper removal of branches is key. The goal is to avoid cutting into and removing the branch collar with a flush cut, while not leaving a stub. The branch collar contains tissue that signals the plant to set a protective zone, otherwise the serious wound may be infected with wood-decay fungi. Leaving a stub stops the formation of the boundary and results in decay spreading from the stub back into the tree. Illustrations of proper pruning techniques are available at <http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/pubs/ho/ho101/ho101.pdf> or from an extension office.

All pruning cuts should be made back to or just above a growing point. For example, remove branches just above a bud, above a side branch, back to a main branch or trunk, or back to the ground.

Remember to keep the pruning equipment sharp. A clean-cut forms callus tissue to wall itself off faster and causes less injury to the tree. After removing a branch, allow the tree to use its own defenses to protect itself.

The proper use of the pruner is best for the plant and the tool. The scissor-action of hand pruners and two-handed lopping shears cleanly cuts the stem without crushing it. Hand pruners cut stems up to one-half inch in diameter. Attempting to cut larger branches risks making a poor cut and/or ruining the shears. Lopping shears are used to remove branches over one-half inch in diameter.

Use a pruning saw to remove larger branches. Pruning saws cut on the pull stroke. The narrow blades fit into tight spaces and make clean cuts.

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To avoid spreading plant diseases, disinfect tools after each cut, especially when pruning a tree with a disease like fire blight which infects crabapple trees. Apply Lysol or 70 percent denatured ethyl alcohol to the blades. Disinfect tools before pruning the next plant.

The worst time to prune is at bud break in the spring. The shrub or tree uses all of the stored energy from the last season to develop leaves. At this time, injuries are much worse. Another undesirable time to prune is during leaf drop in the fall. The plant needs energy to close the surface area where the leaf was attached to the tree or shrub. Furthermore, do not prune a tree or shrub when the wood is frozen. This damages the plant's water-conducting tubes called xylem. The damage to the branch appears during hot, dry weather when water is not able to move through the branch to the leaves.

For more information about pruning shrubs and trees, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's tips:

Do not apply paint or tar where a branch on a shrub or tree is removed. Research shows these materials hold in moisture, increase decay, and inhibit formation of wound wood roll to close off the area.

Upcoming Event:

“Plants to Encourage Backyard Pollinators” will be held at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office on February 27. The program will be held at 1:00 and 6:00 p.m.

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