

Pruning with a Purpose

This is the third in our three-part series on planning, planting and pruning. This article focuses on pruning. There are a variety of reasons to prune a tree or shrub; some of which include the following:

1. Maintain and improve plant health. You want to thin out the inner branches to prevent powdery mildew, leaf spot and other fungal diseases
2. Remove dead, diseased, broken wood, crossing or rubbing branches
3. Control natural shape and size. It's all about esthetics – the key word here is “natural”
4. Safety: Loose, broken or hanging branches rubbing on your roof or hanging too low on the sidewalk or street
5. Visibility: For security reasons, you may want to prune so you have a better view from inside of your space and so unsavory characters aren't able to lurk around your property without your seeing them
6. Improve flowering and fruiting: The more flowers you have, the more fruit – it's just a given
7. Provide for sun exposure and air circulation - Thin out inner canes to allow ample air flow
8. Restore balance/symmetry: If this is your goal, it can be performed at any time of the year
9. Rejuvenate deciduous shrubs: Your goal is to cut it back hard, to promote vigorous new growth which will lead to a higher number of blooms

Tools and Materials

No matter what we're doing in the garden, there are tools and materials that we need to use, in order to keep us safe. Oftentimes, we're overzealous, but well intended, and we may overlook the necessary resources needed to keep us out of harm's way and sometimes our own way.

Follow these guidelines for proper pruning:

1. Power Saw: If you have to physically climb into a tree (if your feet have to leave the ground), you need to hire a professional arborist who is insured against personal injury and property damage
2. When climbing a ladder to reach limbs, make certain someone holds the ladder or tie it in place before pruning
3. Keep all of your equipment in a dry room – make certain all of your tools are sharp and in good operating condition
4. If your tree is diseased, make certain to disinfect your blades after each use to prevent the spread of diseases to healthy plant material (use alcohol or one part bleach to nine parts water)
5. Oil your pruning equipment well to avoid rust

Winter pruning allows you to see the structure of the tree or shrub while it's dormant and all of the leaves are removed. So, keep your gardening skills sharp and tuned, even during the winter months.