

Pruning in Winter

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So, you are thinking about our Greens Workshop this month and have decided to cut a few evergreen boughs to use for your wreath. But what else might benefit from a little selective pruning this time of year? Actually, most trees and shrubs that actually need to be pruned are best pruned now that they are dormant and not putting forth new growth. The key word here is need. Every growing thing does not need to be pruned. And if you think you need a chain saw, a protective helmet and a ladder, think again about hiring a professional better equipped and skilled to do this job. But for the average deciduous (loses leaves in winter) or evergreen tree or shrub, an ordinary pair of pruning shears and a pair of loppers should do the job.

Before you decide to prune, ask yourself why you are going to prune the plant. Are there diseased branches? Do you need to direct the new growth? Is the plant getting too unruly or large? Is the plant needing renewal in growth or flower production? If you cannot answer the why to your pruning, perhaps you should reconsider. And if you do not know the growth and flowering habits of the plant, then you probably can't prune it successfully. And do you have the necessary tools in good condition to do the job? Generally, a sharpened set of bypass pruning shears is sufficient for most small jobs. (Do not use the anvil type of shears as the blade crushes the plant rather than cuts it.) Lopping shears will be needed if the diameter of the stem is greater than 1/2", and a pruning saw will cut branches greater than 1 1/2" in diameter.

So, now you are ready with your sharpened tools, protective eyeglasses and a vision of what you want to accomplish. You know your plant; you know its final mature form and its growth and flowering pattern. And you have a purpose for this pruning. Start by removing only the small twiglets in the center so that you can better see the shape and direction of the larger branches. Consider removing old wood and diseased branches next and those that grow from one side and cross over in the center, exiting on the other side. Thin by cutting back to a bud, branch or main trunk, or head cut by removing the terminal portion of the stem midway.

Some don'ts to remember:

Do not prune just for the sake of pruning.

Do not coat wound on tree or shrub.

Do not remove more than one-third of any tree or shrub. If the plant needs more pruning to alter the shape or reinvigorate it, consider doing this over three years.

Do not prune your *Hydrangea macrophylla* (the blue, pink or purple snowball or florist's hydrangeas) as these bloom on old wood and have already formed next season's flower buds. If you cut these bud branches, you are sacrificing next year's flowers. The same is true for lilacs. Both of these shrubs should be pruned just after the flowers have finished. Other hydrangeas (lacecaps, oakleaf, Limelight, PeeGees, etc.) can be pruned now or in early spring before they start to grow. Roses can be pruned now or before they break dormancy in late

winter. Prune back to five leaves pointing outward to encourage the new growth to grow away from the center of the plant.

So, go ahead and take a few judicious cuts off your evergreen shrubs. The purpose is to use these greens for the holiday wreaths and centerpieces that you will make and enjoy this season.

Happy Holidays!