

HOME & GARDEN TIPS

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Now is the Prime Time to Prune Some Plants

Winter doesn't offer a total break from garden chores. Now is a good time to prune plants, but only if you need to. Not everything needs to be pruned.

Wait to prune early spring bloomers like forsythia, dogwood or azaleas after their blooms fade. Pruning now will cut off the buds that have formed on the tips of the branches and you'll lose your spring blooms.

Later-blooming plants can be pruned now through the end of this month. These include summer blooming crepe myrtles, butterfly bushes, gardenias and plants that aren't known for their flowering such as hollies and other evergreens.

There are three main reasons to prune. One is to reclaim a space that's overgrown. Another is to remove dead wood and a third is to invigorate growth and reshape a plant.

To know how to prune is just as important as know what to prune. Avoid shearing or hedging plants. That will cause a heavy canopy to develop on the top of the plant and restrict new growth from inside the plant.

The best method is to carefully select whole branches to remove that will reshape the plant to the form you want. Always make your cut just outside the branch collar of main branch or just behind a bud.

One way to reclaim severely overgrown plants is called rejuvenation or renewal pruning. This requires cutting the main stems back to about 8 inches above the ground. The best time to do this is when plants are dormant between now and the end of this month. This works for many varieties of plants.

However, don't do this to conifers or boxwoods or to plants you want to bloom this season. Improper pruning can lead to problems. Making pruning cuts incorrectly often leaves stubs that tend to become wet and decay attracting harmful pests. Be sure to use quality, razor-sharp hand pruners to make clean cuts and prevent fraying branches.

Don't cut corners when buying pruning equipment. Buy quality equipment with replaceable parts. Be sure to maintain it by keeping it sharp, clean and oiled.

For more information of what plants to prune and how to do it, get the free UGA Extension publication, Basic Principles of Pruning Woody Ornamentals. You can get it from the County Extension office.