

New Years Resolution
Charles Lancaster
Catoosa Co. Extension Coordinator
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Happy New Year!! I hope each of you had a safe and relaxing Holiday Season and are excited about what the New Year will offer. Even though winter has only been around for a few weeks we all know that Spring is just around the corner. One of the most common questions I get each year is when do I prune what. Huston County Extension Agent Willie Chance has shared several of the most important pruning tips in the following article.

It is time for New Year's resolutions. If you are looking for a gardening resolution, may I suggest one? If you do this properly, it should improve your shrubs' and trees' health and looks while reducing the amount of time you must spend in your garden. This garden resolution involves cutting back on how much you cut back. I am talking about reducing how much you prune.

Pruning is cutting off plant parts to improve plant shape or health and to reduce plant size. Over pruning damages plants and destroys their beauty.

Many plants require little pruning. A problem occurs when we select plants too large for the site or plant them too close to other plants, buildings or walks. Then we have to prune more because of planning errors. Plan ahead to avoid having to prune a lot.

Consider how big plants will ultimately be when selecting or planting them. For instance, many of us plant Leyland Cypress not realizing that it may grow 30 feet wide and 50 to 60 feet tall. To make this worse, a Leyland Cypress cannot be easily pruned to another shape or size.

Do not prune too early or too late. A simple rule is to prune spring flowering plants (those that bloom before May 1) after they bloom, but before July 15. Prune non-bloomers or summer bloomers from January through mid-September. This rule works for many trees and shrubs.

Late pruning of spring blooming plants cuts off flower buds and can ruin the spring flower show. Late pruning of any evergreen plant leaves a lot of bare branches and cut stems showing since new growth has slowed or ceased for the year. Plants pruned in late September through December recover slowly and look "clipped" through the winter.

Another problem with late pruning is that plants may try to make new growth which will be killed by cold weather. This can make plants unsightly and slow recovery in the spring. Prune at the proper time!

Do not prune too often. We want plants to slowly increase in size every year and to attain a natural shape. They should not look like green meatballs with all the new growth pruned off. Plants should keep some new growth to make food for the plant. I cannot tell you how often your plants need to be pruned, but do not constantly shear off all new growth. Try pruning them two

or three times a year, less if possible. Over pruning can make plants too thick on top, thin in the interior and weak. It can also lead to insect or disease problems.

When pruning trees, do not top them. Topping should be only a last ditch effort to save a tree in a great peril. Topping creates an unnatural looking tree. It can also encourage decay in a tree. Topping can increase the amount of maintenance you must do and cannot be easily undone if at all.

If the tree must be reduced in size, select individual branches to remove. Do not cut branches off in the middle. Instead remove entire branches at the point where they are attached to the main limb. Contact us for more details.

Can you tell that there are many pitfalls to pruning? Resolve to improve your plants and landscape this year by proper pruning.

Willie's challenge and suggestions a good one's to keep in mind as we look out over our landscape and think about some of the pruning task that may lie ahead.

For more information on these and other related topics, call me at (706) 935-4211 or come by your Catoosa County Extension Office at 43 Maple Street, Ringgold.

Happy New Year from your Catoosa County Extension Staff.

