

PRUNING

Pruning this time of year can seem a little off the garden wall to some, but I truly enjoy working my garden and landscape at this time of year. Seems we are able to see our tree and shrub branching the most clearly in February and March. When making prune choices during dormant months we need to understand that for most plants flower buds have been set for the coming season. This is true on trees like Dogwood and many other flowering trees, however I still take the opportunity now to thin out my younger trees to improve overall branching habit and shape.

I also work with all my deciduous shrubs to do the same. While many again have set flower buds, the spring show will be much more rewarding with a properly thinned and shapely specimen. Some varieties of flowering shrubs benefit greatly from aggressive dormant prunes, Butterfly Bush, Tree Hydrangea and other summer flowering shrubs all flower on new growth so pruning now is imperative to beautiful specimens later in the season.

Listen, I see many home gardens and talk with many gardeners and I understand the fear of making the wrong pruning choice. But over and over again the problems associated with not pruning are much worse than any prune you can make.

Here on the nursery, we prune constantly. Our prune list includes trees and shrubs of over 450 different varieties. On a weekly basis, we review pruning priorities. Also, in my own garden at home, I am constantly improving my collection with selective pruning. I learned to prune through trial and error as should you. The key is to prune.

Most Pennsylvania Pride plants you use will require some type of pruning at some time, be it removal of broken branches or aggressive shearing to induce new growth and flower buds. Rule of thumb when it comes to pruning is to have a reason to prune, a goal of the pruning, and an expected response. My grandmother would tell me, "When you prune, prune aggressively or don't prune at all." I still follow this today, both on the nursery and at home.

We refer to pruning as either simple or involved. A simple prune means we recommend an aggressive prune and do not be concerned with where, when or how hard you prune. An overwhelming and common mistake in the home garden is not pruning enough. For some plants we recommend an involved prune, meaning it is imperative that certain cuts at certain times be done. Fortunately, most involved prunes occur on the nursery long before your tree is taken home.

Prune regularly, follow our growing tips and contact us online for specific questions or ask your local Garden Center for advice. But trust me on this, the risk in not pruning is far greater than the risk in pruning. The reward for aggressive pruning is fresh growth, new and increased flowers and well behaved plants.

*- Don Eaton
Pennsylvania Pride Grow Team*

