

## Pruning Trees and Shrubs

Proper pruning will help keep your trees and shrubs healthy and within the size limits you desire. You should prune for three reasons: **to train and redirect growth, to maintain their health by removing damaged, dead, diseased or weak wood, and to increase the quality or quantity of fruit or flowers.**

Prune trees effectively by first removing dead, diseased or crossing branches; this includes suckering growth and watersprouts. When those branches have been removed, prune for form. Make the smallest cuts first and the largest ones last. **Never top a tree** or you will lose the leader, produce unbalanced growth, and **never remove more than 25 percent of the foliage** limbs in any one season. If it is necessary to make large pruning cuts on your trees, try to do so in the dormant season (late fall thru early spring). Dormant pruning will enable you to clearly examine the entire tree structure, disease and insects are less active therefore less likely to infect open pruning wounds at this time of year, and early season growth of the tree will heal the cuts quickly. However, at any time of year if a branch is dead, diseased or in a dangerous location, prune it as soon as you spot it. **To prune heavy tree limbs**, make your cuts in three stages. Make the first cut halfway thru the underside of the branch two feet from the trunk. This will prevent the limb from tearing off bark as the branch falls. Next, make the second cut on the top, just to the inside of the bottom cut, to remove the limb. The final cut to remove the branch stub should be flush with the branch collar (swollen area between the main trunk and branch that accelerates the healing process).

**Shrubs**, if not thinned or cut back, will become overgrown and crowded. A healthy shrub will benefit by removing one third of its size each year. Spring blooming shrubs, such as Forsythia, bloom on last season's wood. They will set their buds in early summer that remain dormant until next spring. These shrubs should be pruned immediately after blooming. Summer and fall blooming shrubs are best pruned in early spring down to where new growth is being formed. A heavy pruning at this time will result in a more vigorous plant with denser growth and an abundance of flowers. **When pruning shrubs make selective cuts** by first removing damaged, dead, diseased or crossing branches, then remove long shoots that ruin the shape of the plant. Remember to thin the interior of the shrub by pruning one third of the oldest branches down to the ground to increase air and light penetration and rejuvenate growth. **Refrain from shearing** individual shrubs, unless you are deadheading or disbudding, because this will cause poor overall development and unnatural growth habit. The practice of shearing is best used when maintaining a formal hedge or topiaries. If you choose to shear be sure to shape the hedge so it is narrower at the top and wider at the bottom. This will allow sunlight to reach the bottom leaves.

Non-flowering, standard varieties of **evergreens** like Arborvitae, Holly and Juniper need little pruning maintenance. The best time to prune them is in late spring into early summer when the new growth is still soft. Prune Spruces and Pines that form "candle" growth at this time too, cutting the candles or branch tips in half. If you choose to shear evergreens into a formal shape or to form denser growth you will have to maintain the shearing each year.

In pruning trees and shrubs there are a few other tips to consider such as pruning cuts should be made at a 45-degree angle just above the bud or branch to which you are cutting back. Do not leave stubs that allow for disease and insects to invade the plant. Never prune back to bare, unproductive wood unless you intend for no new growth to form. Make sure your shears and saws are sharp and sterilized. You want a clean cut. Pruning sealants are generally not used unless there is an apparent disease or insect infestation that could invade the cut. **See the back of this flyer for more detailed pruning information.**