

Shrub Pruning

"A good pruning job is like a good haircut--it should be hardly noticed!"

WHEN

- Late winter, early spring for most shrubs except spring flowering ones
- Summer or after flowering for most spring flowering shrubs and trees.
- Avoid spring pruning during the spring "flush of growth"--the plants needs its stored energy.
- Avoid fall pruning--it stimulates possible new growth, and it robs carbohydrates which are being moved and stored in the roots for next year's energy.

WHY

- To remove dead, diseased branches
- To remove crossed branches
- To correct defects
- To control size and redirect growth (careful !)
- For beauty or increased flowering (careful !)
- To rejuvenate
- To limb up to tree form
- Never, never hat-rack ! Never cut main branches and leave stubs--they are ugly and cause weakly attached limbs to grow as "pom-poms". Most arborists say that topping is the worst thing you can do for the health of a tree--and this applies to shrubs also.

HOLLIES AND OTHER BROAD-LEAF EVERGREEN SHRUBS

THINNING AND HEADING BACK

- When a shrub is overgrown make it smaller with hand clippers--not hedge shears.
- Selectively cut the longest and largest branch deep inside the plant 6-12 inches below the desired final height. You want these cuts hidden.
- Continue to cut the longest and largest branch deep until the desired size is achieved.
- Finish by cutting smaller branches and very selectively some tips
- Maintain the natural shape of the plant un-cut tips and with some openings.

- Keep it natural looking
- Don't undercut and create leggy plants--keep the bottom wider than the top.
- Don't create "green meatballs"...Dr. Mike Dirr
- Avoid hard, geometric shapes for most landscapes.
- When--usually late winter, early spring, is best

RENEWAL

- When a shrub is much larger than it can be tolerated--take drastic action.
- Cut back to within 6-12 inches of the ground--maybe with the chain saw.
- Re-cut branches as necessary with hand clippers or lopping shears to make clean cuts.
- Don't "flat top", but shape with longest branches in the center.
- When--late winter, early spring before growth begins so it won't look so ugly very long. New growth will begin soon, and by summer it will look like a shrub again.
- Selectively prune to insure a natural shape during the summer--avoid undercutting.

PRUNING CRAPEMYRTLE TREES

- The Crape Myrtle is one of our finest small-growing trees, but is butchered and mutilated by so many people--professionals as well as amateurs.
- If you err, err by under pruning. Basically, leave the tree alone.
- *Never, never, never* top or hat-rack a Crape Myrtle--or any tree, for that matter !!!!!
- Avoid cutting branches larger than pencil size--and this only to do minimum shaping.
- Topped trees put out "poodle-like" or "pom-pom" growth (many suckers) that are un-natural and detrimental. Over the years knots develop--*ugly!*
- Remove dead, damaged or badly crossing branches as necessary.
- If large limbs must be removed, cut just outside the "branch collar", not completely flush with the trunk. But don't leave stubs--ugly and detrimental.
- Leave the spent flower heads on--they add beauty and character to the winter form.
- Limb up if a tree-form is desired. The bark is one of the beautiful features.
- Triple trunks are often considered most attractive.
- Do remove suckers at the base--this is the worst problem with Crape Myrtle. When--if you just must prune, do it late March to minimize the ugly period. never prune any tree in the fall--it is sending its carbohydrates into the roots for storage.

- Don't try to make a shrub of a large-growing Crape Myrtle--there are cultivars that mature from 2 feet to 25 feet; select the right one for the location.
- If absolutely necessary, do "renewal pruning"--cut it to 6-12 inches of the ground, then over the next couple of years, prune it to 3 to 5 trunks--or a dozen.

TOOLS FOR PRUNING

- Hand clippers are the main tool--bypass type (scissor-action) much preferred over anvil type.
- Lopping shears, bypass type,
- Pruning saw, curved blade.
- Maybe a chain saw for renewal pruning of large shrubs, or tree limbs.
- Pole/Saw pruners for reaching high.
- Hedge Clippers (use for hedges only, not shrubs!)
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- Spartanburg Men's Garden Club (\$25 single, \$30 family)
Jim Bagwell, Treas., 123 Sugarmill Lane., Moore, SC 29369
- Trees Spartanburg (division of SPACE)
Co Irwin, Coordinator, PO Box 18168, Spartanburg, SC 29318
- The Arbor Day Foundation (\$15)
100 Arbor Ave, Nebraska City, NE 68410
- Scenic America (\$20)
21 DuPont Circle, Washington, DC 20036

Henry Pittman, Pittman Gardens, February 2002