

Springtime pruning suits most trees and bushes

It's spring - time to sharpen your tools and get into the garden.

The first task is pruning trees, except maple, birch, beech and nut-bearing varieties that will "bleed" sap if pruned now.

Beginning gardeners often find pruning difficult so it's time for a refresher course.

Start by removing any broken or dead branches.

Older books will recommend cutting branches flush to the trunk or branch but new research has shown that the "branch collar" indicated by an area of rings at the base of each branch should not be cut into as this is where healing will take place.

Remove any suckers that have sprung from the base of the tree and any growth that has developed along the trunk below the crown.

Cut off any water sprouts from fruit trees.

These are non-fruiting shoots that grow straight up from the horizontal branches. If two branches cross or rub against one another, one of them must be removed.

If two branches are situated so close that they will not have room to reach maturity without interfering, one should be sacrificed while still young.

Any branch that grows parallel to the main trunk should be removed.

You can shape the future growth by making your cuts above an outward facing bud - the next branch will grow in the direction that the bud points.

Shrubs that bloom in summer or fall are best pruned now.

Each year remove several of the oldest stems at ground level. This keeps a shrub always youthful and blooming well.

Butterfly bushes should be cut back completely to about six inches above the soil. If you planted a new clematis last year, it should be cut back to about two-and-a-half to three feet.

Remove the winter-killed portion of canes on climbing and shrub roses.

You may wish to wait until you can see which buds are alive.

Tender roses should have the winter mulch removed gradually and then be pruned back to leave only three to five stems with

three to five buds on each.

Major reshaping of evergreens is best tackled now, while regular yearly pruning should be done in June after spring's new growth.

If you have a very large pine or spruce whose bottom branches are now less than beautiful, consider removing them to a height of six or seven feet.

Some say this advice is heresy but if you look at these trees in a forest situation you will see that this is how Mother Nature shapes her mature evergreens.

I hope you will take a few moments to respond to a perennial survey. Which of the following "Perennials of the Year" do you have in your garden: 1990 - Phlox stolonifera; 1991 - Heuchera 'Palace Purple'; 1992 - Coreopsis verticillata 'Moonbeam'; 1993 - Veronica 'Sunny Border Blue'; 1994 - Astilbe simplicifolia 'Sprite'; 1995 - Perovskia atriplicifolia (Russian Sage); 1996 - Penstemon 'Husker Red'. And which is the best performing perennial in your garden?



Let's Get Growing

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