

Pruning Shrubs

Now that spring is almost upon us and the sun is a little warmer, it's a good time to get out and evaluate your shrubs and evergreens before new growth obscures your view.

Look for branches damaged by wind, snow or ice. Check if deer, rabbits or other animals have been chewing on branches. Prune any damaged branches.

At the base of the plants, remove any vegetation that is inside the plant. Remove leaves and other debris from the soil. Check the plant for any signs of insects or disease that may have occurred last year. It will likely reoccur if preventative steps are not taken. Remove any damaged branches, sterilizing your pruners with a solution of 1 part bleach and 5 parts water.

Now stand back and take a good look at the shape and size of the plant. Does the plant still fit in the landscape or is it being crowded out by nearby plants? Does it still get the amount of sun it requires?

If it looks great minimal pruning is all that may be required to make it look fresh again.

Before you reach for the pruners, bear in mind that spring flowering shrubs will lose much of this spring's blooms if pruned early. Those shrubs can wait until after they've bloomed to be trimmed. Shrubs that bloom later should be trimmed now before they set their new growth.

Hand held pruners or secateurs work best when pruning. Power trimmers or shears should only be used on hedges.

As a landscape matures, some plants will grow more rapidly than others eventually becoming too overgrown for their location or in relation to other plants. It's time to rejuvenate the plant with some selective pruning. This procedure works very well on flowering shrubs and some evergreens.

With selective pruning, a plant can be made to look young and fresh again. Look for the taller older branches. Prune them at the base of the plant. Cut branches that are crisscrossing, rubbing or leaning on each other. Remove any branches that are touching the ground. Cut any side shoots that are aiming toward the centre of the plant. These are generally weak branches that prevent sun, light and air circulation from penetrating the centre and reduce the amount of blooms.

Now look at the remaining branches. If the plant is too tall or wide, you can remove up to 1/3 of its height or width with no serious effects.

You may lose some of this year's bloom but it will pay back next year.

When pruning, always make the cut just above a bud that is pointing to the outside of the shrub. This helps to prevent dieback of the branch tips as well as reduce the risk of disease. Avoid pruning all branches to the same height as doing so forms a thick matted growth which goes brown inside from lack of sunlight and air movement.

When you are finished, water the soil at the base if the soil is dry. Give the plant some nutrients such as organic fertilizer, well-rotted manure or bonemeal.