

# WINTER TO EARLY SPRING PRUNING

## **1. *The Basics of How to Prune***

- **Making proper cuts:** Always make “clean” cuts, 45 degrees on branches, no “stubs” allowed!
- **Types of Pruning:** Pinching, Shearing, Thinning, Heading Back. Learn which plants respond to which type of pruning, and the proper techniques for each.
- **Use the right tool for the right job and keep ‘em sharp!** Look at options for pruning tools – snips, bypass pruners, ratchet pruners, small folding saws, loppers, shears, pole pruners, and others. Utilize a great sharpening tool to keep them sharp and make the job easier!

## **2. *Why to prune? Have a purpose!***

- **Increase fruiting/flowering for the future:** Maximize production of blooms, fruit, berries, etc. by pruning the right way at the right time of year.
- **Improve shape/structure:** This can be done with some thinning and/or heading back, by removing crossing limbs and evening out branching. Let the plant attain its natural beauty in the landscape.
- **Improve air circulation/decrease disease:** Let sun/wind into the center of plant to improve air movement with thinning cuts. This will cut down disease potential, particularly on prone plants like roses and others.
- **No one says you have to prune everything every year.** To prune or not to prune – that is the question! Let your specimen tell you when it needs a prune. Is it too big? Blocking a view? Burying the garage? Obstructing other plants from growing? Casting too much shade? Growing onto the lawn? Crowding a fence or siding on the house? On the gutters or roof? There are lots of good reasons to contemplate pruning, but you don’t necessarily have to prune everything every year in the landscape.

## **3. *Know your plants in your landscape***

- **Watch for disease/winter damage:** Was the plant healthy the past growing season? Is there damage from a windstorm? Breakage from snow? You can always remove dead/diseased limbs at any time all year long.
- **Prune after bloom – always a good rule to live by.** Knowing when your plants bloom is key. Does your specimen bloom on new wood or old wood? Ask if you do not know. A few examples – Hydrangea (new or old wood), Spiraea (new wood), Rhododendrons (old wood), Dogwood (old wood), Magnolia (old wood). Remember if you cut back an old wood bloomer in winter, plant will not suffer but there will be minimal flowers to enjoy.
- **The 1/3 rule – never cutting more than 1/3 of a plant in a season is safe.** Many of us break this one on occasion and with some plants, more than a third is okay. But you are always safe cutting a 1/3 in height and/or width with deciduous plants. With evergreens, we need to be a bit more careful. Rarely will an evergreen plant bounce back if you cut into bare wood!
- **Put the right plant in the right spot, then you won’t have to prune as much!** When selecting plants for your landscape, look at ultimate size and growth habit – does it fit the spot? Do you need a dwarf variety instead? Also consider, can this plant be pruned easily and... will you take the time to do it? Some plants, like boxwood or laurel, can take annual shearing, but they can’t be left alone for 5 years and then cut back to the original size.

#### **4. *What I prune in winter/early spring***

- **Deciduous shrubs/trees of all kinds:** This includes Japanese Maples (especially lace leaves), Fruits/Berries, Roses, Hydrangeas, and bazillions more – but be careful not to sacrifice spring bloom on early bloomers. Examples: Forsythia – why cut off your winter bloom display? Lilac – prune in winter and you cut most of your flower buds off for the next spring. Spiraea example of can be sheared back hard with no loss of flower the coming season.
- **Remember, no touching the evergreen broadleaves until after frost in spring!** Let these plants stay dormant until spring, and don't encourage any new growth until after frost. Also consider if they bloom on old or new wood so you do not decrease flowering for the season.

#### **5. *After pruning, protect your specimens with a dormant spray application***

- Apply a combination of Liquicop and Horticultural Oil to protect against diseases and to eradicate any bug issues over the winter. This will help ensure you start the next season clean.
- Had any issues with a plant in 2022 growing season? Be sure to apply spray to help start 2023 healthy.
- **Liquicop** lasts for 30 days in rain, but apply on a dry day so it can stick first. This is a great natural disease preventer, and it can be used during growing season as well to control diseases. Always read the label for instructions!
- **Horticultural Oil** is OMRI certified and makes a great dormant spray. Apply on a dry day and it can be mixed directly with Liquicop in the same sprayer for one application of both. The oil will coat branches/twigs/etc. and smother overwintering insect eggs and larvae. It can be used in the growing season as well. Always read the label for instructions!