

When Is The Right Time To Prune?

Winter Pruning (January & February)

In general, prune dormant deciduous plants in winter such as:

- Deciduous ornamental trees
- Fruit trees – Note that these are pruned very different from ornamental trees to maximize fruiting spurs. Be sure to consult a pruning guide before proceeding.
- Roses – Generally February. There are different types of roses and each is pruned differently.
- Wisteria is cut back hard in winter and then again in the summer, after blooming.
- Certain vines – Check pruning guides for details on when and how.

Early Spring Pruning (March & April)

- Good time to prune conifers (pine, fir, cedar, etc.) to minimize sap “bleeding”
- Hydrangeas (shrub form) after frost danger has passed
- Most hedges, such as laurel, privet, Leylandii cypress, etc.
- Red & yellow twig dogwoods are cut back hard now to stimulate the colorful new growth that will light up next winter’s landscape

Late Spring / Early Summer Pruning

In general, prune spring blooming plants right after they bloom. Pruning them earlier often guarantees that you cut off all the flower buds and miss out on that year’s display. Specific plants include:

- Rhododendrons – These and many other plants start setting flower buds shortly after the current flowers fade, so don’t dilly dally. If you rhododendron needs shaping, get to it right after bloom so the plant has time to set flower buds the coming year.
- Camellias
- Forsythia
- Rock Rose
- Peonies
- Pieris
- Shear spent flowers on herbs such as lavender, rosemary, thyme & oregano

Summer Pruning

For the most part, summer pruning is a matter of deadheading and light trimming. Some people give their Japanese maples a bit of a hair cut in summer because they get so twiggy, but that's optional.

Fall Pruning

Avoid this practice. I know many people were raised in households where pruning trees and shrubs was part of the fall cleanup and preparation for winter, but it is not good horticultural practice. All pruning stimulates growth and new growth is very susceptible to cold damage. If a plant is exposed to a sudden early freeze, the new growth may be killed and the overall health of the plant jeopardized.

What about storm damage?

Remove dead, broken or damaged branches any time of year.