

COLLIER'S NURSERY

2904 Old Rocky Ridge Road Birmingham, AL 35243
Telephone (205) 822-3133

PRUNING BASICS

First answer the questions: Why am I pruning? When does the plant I am pruning bloom? What am I pruning with? What season are we in? Pruning is one of the most mysterious, fearsome topics for many gardeners. I was perplexed in school about pruning and inquired to my advisor, "When is the best time to prune?" He replied with a straight face, "When the blades are sharp." I wouldn't say that it is that simple, but it is not as complicated as most people make it out to be.

My Basic Pruning Precepts:

1. *I have never seen a healthy plant die from being pruned.* So don't worry about killing the plant, but know what you are trying to do and the overall look you are trying to achieve.
2. *If it blooms before Memorial Day, your pruning window is until July.* These plants bloom on wood that was formed during the previous summer, often called old wood.
3. *If it blooms after Memorial Day, you can prune it just about anytime.* These plants bloom on current seasons growth, so pruning might delay the bloom but it shouldn't prevent them.
4. *Avoid pruning anything in October.* Pruning on the front edge of winters first freezes promotes succulent new growth that won't have sufficient time to harden off before the cold comes.
5. *If at all possible perform all pruning with hand pruners.* If you're using two hands to prune, you are probably doing something wrong!

Types of Pruning:

Sheering: Uniformly cutting back the tips of plants to create geometric lines. Only appropriate for formal hedges and usually can be detrimental in the long run.

Thinning Selectively taking out older shoots to the base of the plant with hand pruners. This creates a more natural look and encourages new, vigorous growth.

Heading: Selectively pruning to shorten the taller branches to reduce the size of a plant.

Renewal Pruning: Pruning a plant back drastically in an effort to rejuvenate it.

Deadheading: Simply removing the old flower/seed heads from the plant.

Some of the Most Common Plants

Crape Myrtles: It is best to plant the appropriate crape myrtle for the appropriate place and let it gracefully mature with very little pruning. If you must prune the best rule of thumb is to prune off anything smaller than a pencil while leaving the center of the tree the tallest and tapering down on the sides. The best time to prune is in late Winter. You can limb up the crape myrtles or remove the little sprouts anytime of year.

Hydrangeas: Oakleaf hydrangeas need to be pruned shortly after they have bloomed. French (Mophead) Hydrangeas although best to be pruned after flowering they can be pruned anytime of year. If blooming is diminished it is due to late Winter freezes. Annabelle, Pee Gee and Tardiva Hydrangeas can be pruned anytime. If you have the time it is always beneficial to deadhead hydrangeas.

Azaleas: Prune after they have bloomed if necessary. .

Camellias: Prune after they have bloomed if necessary.

Roses: Hybrid teas - prune back by 30% in the Fall; Prune to 3-5 canes 18" tall in February. Shrub Roses - prune back lightly in Fall and hard in February if necessary. Climbers - prune out some of the oldest canes back to the ground in late Winter.

Hollies & Broadleaf Evergreens: This basically includes any evergreen shrub that has no real flowering importance. Prune lightly whenever needed, prune heavily in late winter.

Perennials: Deadhead and rejuvenate prune throughout Summer. Can prune down to the ground after a heavy frost.

Annuals: Deadhead and rejuvenate prune throughout summer.

Ferns: Prune deciduous ferns back to the ground after a hard frost. Prune evergreen ferns back to the ground at least every other year in February.

Conifers: Can be tricky. Is best to just tip these plants back as needed.

Hedges: Prune anytime needed but try from an early age to develop a triangle with the top cut off shape with the lower branches wider than the taller ones.

Spirea: For the most part the white blooming Spirea should only be pruned after flowering, while the pink bloomers can be pruned anytime.

Gardenias: Prune after they have bloomed.

Trees: Too complicated to go into detail, but it is fine to limb up trees and remove suckers anytime of year.

Candidates for renewal pruning: Roses, Loropetalum, Hollies, Vines, Abelia, Spirea, Forsythia, Summer Blooming Hydrangeas, and many more.

Candidates for Late Winter Haircuts: Liriope, Autumn Fern, Holly Fern, Cast Iron Plant.