

Even though the winds are howling and night time temps are dipping below freezing, horticulture folks know it's time to gear up for this year's growing season. Many calls came in to the office last fall regarding 'time to prune', well, February is a good month. This is the ideal time to prune most deciduous trees and shrubs. With the leaves off the trees, the branches are easy to see. Trees are dormant and experience less stress compared with plants pruned during active growth. Also, most disease agents are dormant, thus minimizing the spread of disease.

Before pruning, it is important to sharpen and prepare equipment. There are many different tools available for pruning, and each has a very unique purpose. Hand pruners and loppers are very similar, differing mainly in size. Hand pruners are designed for small jobs and are typically used to cut branches up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch in diameter. Loppers have longer handles and are designed for cutting larger stems up to 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter, depending on the lopper.

Both loppers and hand pruners come with two different types of blades, an anvil type blade or a by-pass blade. Anvil blades come together as they cut and are best for pruning dry, dead wood. Where the blades come together they do not cut cleanly through living tissue and can cause peeling or tearing. For pruning living stems you want to use the bypass style pruner. The two blades move past one another as they cut, much like a scissors, leaving a clean cut.

For branches larger than 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, a pruning saw is necessary. There are many different types of pruning saws, all of which typically have a handles with a curved cutting blade attached. Pole pruners are used to cut overhead branches that are difficult to reach. Pole pruners may have a telescoping pole, or sections that can be fit together. The pole material will affect the ease of use – wooden poles are heavy and cumbersome, while aluminum, fiberglass or plastic poles are easier to handle.

Working overhead can be very dangerous, and it is important to following simple safety precautions. First, it is important to remember that electricity flows through tree branches. Also, aluminum poles conduct electricity. Branches move a great distance during pruning and can come into contact with a wire that seems to be out of reach. When a utility line is near, call your local utility company to coordinate pruning. Never work directly overhead. When cutting an overhead branch work from the side and always wear a hard hat and safety glasses. Also remember that ladders and pruning do not mix. If pruning is needed in a location that cannot be reached with a pole saw, contact a certified arborist.

A chainsaw can be useful for cutting fallen or cut limbs into smaller pieces once they are on the ground. Chainsaws should be used only with appropriate safety gear by people who fully understand their operation. In addition to the hard hat and safety goggles, chainsaw operators should wear leather gloves, ear protection, hard-toed shoes, and chaps.

Please feel free to stop by or contact me if I can be of assistance.

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