DIVISION OF
AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES
AND NATURAL RESOURCES
NEWS RELEASE

Pruning is imperative for good tree and shrub health

Although it still is several weeks away, the spring season will be here soon. This means gardeners still have some time to get their pruning chores done. Keeping trees and shrubs pruned is vital for good health. It also keeps the landscape looking neat and cared for.

The late dormant season is the best time to prune most deciduous trees and shrubs. Pruning late in the winter minimizes the time wounds are exposed before the sealing process begins and can help avoid certain disease and health problems. Some homeowners may still have limbs from the October 2020 ice storm that need attention.

One benefit of pruning late in the winter season is it's easier to make good pruning decisions since there aren't any leaves obscuring the branch structure. However, trees and shrubs grown for their spring flowers, such as forsythia, crabapple and flowering dogwood, should be pruned after they flower. Pruning now would remove many of the flower buds that were formed last year and reduce the display of flowers.

When setting out to prune, keep the three Ds in mind – damage, disease and dead material. As mentioned earlier, some homeowners still may be dealing with tree damage from last fall's ice storm. Now is a good time to get that cleaned up.

Damaged limbs should be removed as they can pose a safety risk. The wound site from a damaged limb also can act as an entry point for disease. Removing damaged limbs and making a clean cut will help the tree wound seal quicker.

Diseased material should be removed and destroyed to prevent further infection. Don't compost any of those materials. Also, remember to clean the pruning tools between cuts when pruning diseased trees.

Keep in mind it never hurts a tree or shrub to remove dead material. Depending on what caused the limb to die, gardeners may be removing a possible source of further injury, such as an insect or disease agent.

When pruning, make sure to use the proper equipment and ensure the blades are sharp. Research indicates wound dressing or pruning paint aren't necessary. In fact, dressing may harbor disease organisms rather than exclude them. Also, wound dressing slows the wound callusing process. A good, clean, unpainted pruning cut normally will callus faster than a painted one.

Safety glasses, long sleeves, long pants and closed-toed shoes are recommended as protective wear.

Taking the time to prune properly helps ensure gardeners have a healthy and beautiful landscape.

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