Pruning is imperative for good tree and shrub health

Despite it still being coats, hats and gloves weather, there are some outside chores gardeners need to do before spring planting season arrives. Pruning, although not necessary every year, is an important part of tree and shrub health and can improve functionality. It also keeps the landscape looking neat and cared for.

Now through late winter is the best time to prune most deciduous trees and shrubs. 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.

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. Pruning late in the winter also minimizes the time wounds are exposed before the sealing process begins and can help avoid certain disease and health problems.

When setting out to prune, keep the three Ds in mind – damage, disease or dead material. Some homeowners may still be dealing with tree damage from storms a couple of years ago. 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 can also act as an entry point for disease. Removing damaged limbs and making a clean cut will help the tree wound seal quicker.

To prevent further infection, remove and destroy diseased material. 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. Despite popular belief, research indicates it’s not necessary to use wound dressing or pruning paint. 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 will normally 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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