

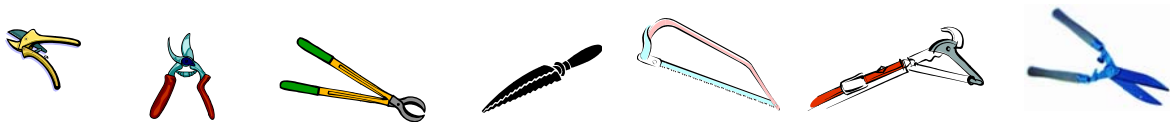
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News Release

Pruning in the Home Landscape 101

Question: The other day I was in one of the home improvement stores and I was amazed at the selection of pruners and other pruning type tools. Why are there so many different choices for the same job? Any other tips you could offer would be helpful because I think I need to prune everything in my yard.

Answer: Oh my, I'm glad we have a chance to talk before you get into landscape demolition! There are many different tools for pruning mainly depending on the type and size of the pruning job. There are two types of hand pruners, the *anvil* type and the *scissor* or *by-pass* type; both may be used to make cuts up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch diameter material. The *by-pass* type will make a cleaner cut but the anvil type is lighter to handle, so choose the one you prefer.

To cut any material larger than $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch in diameter up to a 3 inch diameter you should use *loppers* that come in a variety of sizes. Loppers look like big pruners but with long handles to add leverage to the cut. Loppers are also a good choice when pruning thorny plants as they help keep your hands and arms out of harm's way. For larger cuts than 1 to 3 inches you will need a *pruning saw* which has a curved saw blade designed to cut on the pull stroke and is also available in various sizes. Saws with *raker teeth* would be the choice for larger limbs and a light weight *Bow saw* would be used for medium size limbs. *Pole pruners* are another option for high work especially if there is a danger when using a ladder. Many pole pruners have both a saw and pruner for different uses, but do not cut dead wood of a thickness exceeding 1 inch. *Hedge sheers* are a long straight blade and long handled tool used to clip soft new growth for a clean looking hedge type pruning job. I know it sounds like a lot of equipment but if you buy good quality tools keep them sharp and take good care of them they can last a lifetime, making them a very good investment indeed.



Now about going out and pruning everything in your yard, there are different reasons to prune a plant or as we say “selective removal of specific parts of the plant to benefit the entire plant,” some reasons would be; to stimulate new growth, remove dead or problematic plant parts, disease prevention (air flow or light circulation), to train young plants, aesthetics, develop unusual forms and shapes, size control, or to remove hazards to persons or property.

To my way of thinking knowledge is one of the most important tools to have. You will need to correctly identify the plant, know their natural growth habit, if and when they set buds (flower), and the safest way to handle the job, and then you can start to make good decisions about pruning needs.

Timing is also very important to successful pruning because we don't want to go out and prune off all the blooms of a flowering plant just before it should bloom, plus some plants are very unforgiving of untimely pruning and will not survive. There is something called the May Rule but remember **there are exceptions to every rule** so knowing your plant and its habits is crucial. The May Rule is:

- If it blooms BEFORE May 1....Prune AFTER flowering - blooms on old wood (no later than July 4).
- If it blooms AFTER May 1....Prune BEFORE new growth begins in the spring – blooms on new wood.
- The main question of importance is when does the plant form flower buds? These are what we don't want to prune off before flowering. ***And remember there are exceptions!!!

RECAP – If it blooms on new wood, prune in winter/spring.
If it blooms on old wood, prune it soon after flowering.

This may take some time to figure out but with a little research on your part it will be well worth the time it takes and what you will save on the expense of replacement.

Safety is so important. There are many more safety tips but these are my top ten:

1. Inspect your pruning tools, repair or replace any that need it. Remember a sharp tool is safer than a dull tool.
2. Inspect the area where you will be working for signs of bees, wasps, snakes, poison ivy (even if dormant), thorns, and any other health hazards.
3. Wear appropriate protective equipment, including safety goggles or glasses with side shields, gloves, long-sleeved shirt or jacket, long pants, heavy foot wear, and a hard hat if necessary.
4. Before making a cut be sure all fingers are clear including yours and your helpers.
5. Never prune trees or branches within 10-feet of power lines.
6. Do not cut branches bigger than the pruning tool was designed to cut (thus the many different types of tools).
7. Avoid situations where the falling branches or debris might come in contact with you or your helper (warn others of falling debris).
8. Be aware of the weather around you, keep hydrated and take breaks so you don't become fatigued.
9. Never work alone, plus a second opinion can be helpful.
10. Take your time and step back and look at your work often.

So be careful and remember there is a lot of great information out there to help you master the art of pruning. Visit our website www.aces.edu and search in publications for the individual plants or for care of ornamentals or landscape plants to get you started in the right direction.

For more about this topic please contact Wendy Ulrich, Lab Technician, at the St. Clair County Extension office at (205) 338-9416 or email ulricwg@aces.edu.