



FROM A GARDENING PERSPECTIVE...

A GUIDE TO PRUNING

By

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The weather is cold outside and most of our gardening chores are done for the year. The leaves are falling off the deciduous trees and one can see how the limbs of the tree are growing and shaping the tree. The gardener now has time to take a close look at the trees in the landscape and ask some questions:

- (1) Are there dead limbs in the trees?
- (2) Is the tree misshapen?
- (3) Are the limbs rubbing together?
- (4) Are the limbs too close together so that air does not circulate when the tree is covered with leaves?

These are all conditions that can be corrected with pruning. Tree limbs that are rubbing on each other weaken the tree. If air can not flow through the tree, insects and diseases are more likely to be a problem. Knowing when to prune a particular tree is crucial for the gardeners to receive the maximum benefit for their labor. Another crucial item is cleaning tools before each use to keep them sharp. This will prevent tearing of the bark during pruning. The following is a guideline for various types of trees.

Deciduous trees - Dead wood and mistletoe should be removed.

Live Oak trees - These trees should be pruned only in December or January because of the danger of Oak Wilt. A sealer can be used immediately after each cut to prevent Oak Wilt. This is the only tree that needs a sealer.

Fruit Trees - Fruit trees can be pruned after the first hard freeze and before bud swell in February. They need to be dormant.

Crepe Myrtle - Suckers should be trimmed off the bottom and then the tree can be pruned for air circulation and form like any other tree. Crepe Myrtles should NEVER be topped!

Summer flowering trees and Evergreens may be pruned in March.

Some do's and don'ts about pruning:

1. Care should be taken not to harm the layer under the bark. This is called the cambium layer.
2. If a tree is under two years of age, the lower branches should not be pruned. These lower branches add strength to the tree.
3. If a limb chosen for removal is large, the three step method should be used. This procedure is outlined by the Parker County Master Gardeners in their book, *The Real Dirt*. Step 1- An upward cut a few inches deep should be made about 6-8 inches from the collar (where the limb meets the trunk). This cut prevents tearing the bark of the limb. Step 2 - A second cut should be made beyond first cut through entire limb to remove the limb. Step 3 - The remaining stub should be cut off near but not into the collar. There is no need to put sealer on the cut except for Live Oak trees. Trees will heal themselves.

Remember to prune oak trees only in the dead of winter in an effort to prevent Oak Wilt disease. For more information on tree pruning, the Texas A & M web site can be accessed at aggie-horticulture@tamu.edu. In addition, Palo Pinto Master Gardeners always welcome questions at 940-659-1228.