



Centerville Tree Board Recommendations for

When is the best time to Prune?

When do YOU prune? - The best time of year to prune is 'RIGHT NOW', whatever time of year it is; if the plant has a problem.

Preventative pruning, and major pruning, should be done early in the spring, while the plant is dormant. Minor pruning, shaping, and trimming can be done all summer as needed. Don't prune plants too heavily in the fall, when plants are getting ready for winter. Wait until the plants actually go dormant before pruning them. 'When to prune' depends, to a large extent, on why you are pruning.

Dormant season pruning stimulates new vigorous growth. It is a great time to visually see the tree's structure and make the necessary changes. It is the best time to prune young trees, and to correct major problems in older trees. It helps the tree produce new branches, and healthy new growth in the spring.

Summer Pruning has several advantages.

1. Pruning during the growing season does not stimulate as much new growth. Some plants benefit more from summer pruning than from dormant pruning, especially if a lot of new growth is not wanted. Espaliered and bonsai trees are some types of trees that should be pruned during the summer. Other trees (apple trees for example) benefit from being trimmed twice a year; dormant pruning to control the shape, and summer pruning to control the size, and to remove the suckers.

2. Reducing the canopy size, by pruning in the summer, reduces photosynthesis, thereby reducing the capacity for new growth the following spring.

3. Pruning is easier in nice, warm weather than in cold, winter weather, which means it is more likely to be done.

Basic 'summer-only' pruning is: Cut the new growth by half in mid-spring and then half again in mid-summer. Do not prune heavily in late-summer or early-fall, because this may stimulate an unwanted spurt of growth that will be tender, and may suffer from winter injury.

Late-Fall Pruning helps to prevent damage from heavy snowfalls. Fall pruning also helps eliminate unwanted insect and disease problems. Major fall pruning should be done after the tree is completely dormant, so you do not stimulate any new growth that could be prone to winter injury.

Some trees will bleed sap if they are pruned in the spring. This sap loss is not usually harmful, but it may invite insect or disease problems. Prune trees that bleed either in the late-fall, or during the winter. Maple trees, birch trees, beech trees, dogwood trees, willow trees, grapevines, and some flowering trees will bleed if you prune them in the spring.

General Pruning Guidelines

1. Prune most shrubs, fruit trees, and shade trees in the early spring while they are still dormant (before March).
2. Some trees will bleed sap if they are pruned in the spring. Prune trees that bleed either in the summer or in the late-fall.

Spring Flowering Plants: If your main goal, for a spring flowering plant, is to have as many flowers as possible, be sure to wait until after it is finished blooming to prune. (lilac, forsythia, wisteria, bridal wreath spirea, flowering cherry, flowering pear, flowering plum, redbud, quince, etc.)

Don't forget to prune them right after they finish blooming. If you wait too long to prune them, you will be removing next year's blossoms.

Prune tender plants, such as roses, when the new growth starts to appear in late spring (April). Stop pruning roses in September, to allow them time to prepare for winter.

Summer Flowering Plants: Prune summer flowering plants any time while they are dormant. (Weigela, hibiscus, potentilla, etc.)

Don't prune pine and spruce trees the same way you prune fruit trees or shade trees, or your tree may have an undesirable shape. They have special pruning requirements.

Spruce and fir trees don't grow continuously all year, but they can be pruned any time because they have lateral (side) buds that will sprout if the terminal (tip) buds are removed. It's best to prune them in late winter, before growth begins. Some spring pruning is not harmful.

Pine trees only put on a single flush of tip growth each spring and then stop growing. Prune before these "candles" of new needles become mature (early-June). Pines do not have lateral buds, so removing terminal buds later in the year will take away all the new growing points for that branch. Incorrect pruning will leave dead stubs.

Pine trees seldom need pruning, but if you want to promote more dense growth, remove up to two-thirds of the length of newly expanded candles; before the 'candles' mature. Don't prune further back than the current year's growth.

You can remove entire branches at the trunk, or cut branches back to a major crotch, any time of the year without damaging the tree. Just remember that new growth only occurs at the terminal buds. You cannot top a pine tree, or prune it back severely. Once a pine tree becomes too large, the only solution is to remove the tree and start over.

Arborvitae, junipers, and yews grow continuously throughout the growing season. They can be pruned or sheared any time, from early-spring through the middle of summer, and then again in the fall, after they are dormant.

Prune hedges differently than you prune trees; always use shearing cuts. You want to make a hedge as dense and as bushy as possible. Trim all the branch tips to make them produce as many side branches as possible. Trim hedges a little wider at the bottom than at the top. This helps to keep the plant bushy from top to bottom.

Trim your hedge heavily in the spring; after the new growth is fully developed. Trim your hedge lightly during the summer to maintain its appearance. Trim your hedge two or three times each year, not just once, to keep it looking its best.

Prune grape vines in late-winter; December through February. They will bleed if pruned in the early-spring. Summer pruning helps to keep vines under control, and helps to improve the flavor.

Prune raspberries after they have finished producing fruit, either in the summer or fall. Prune them again, just before winter, to prevent winter cane breakage.