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Fall Pruning?

Tuesday, October 30th, 2012

In general, I don't recommend pruning in the fall, except to remove one or two errant or broken branches, or to remove dead wood. This type of pruning can be done anytime, but remember that individual species can vary quite a bit in what they can tolerate. Because decay fungi spread their spores profusely in the fall, and healing of wounds seems to be slower on fall cuts, this is a good time to leave your pruning tools in storage.

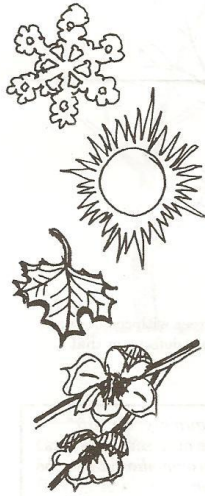
Late winter is the best time for major structural pruning. When spring breaks, the tree is ready to vigorously burst with new healing and growth, so the results sought through the pruning effort are more quickly attained.

Pruning in the summer can also be a better time than fall, especially if you need to correct errant growth, or slow the growth of a part of the tree that you don't want.

Some general guidelines on when to prune are presented below. Click to enlarge.

When To Prune

depends to a large extent on *why* you prune. Light pruning and the removal of dead wood can be done anytime. Otherwise, here are some guidelines, but recognizing that individual species may differ.



Winter Pruning during dormancy is the most common practice. It results in a vigorous burst of new growth in the spring and should be used if that is the desired effect. It is usually best to wait until the coldest part of winter has passed. Some species, such as maple, walnuts and birches, may "bleed" when the sap begins to flow. This is not harmful and will cease when the tree leafs out.

Summer To direct the growth by slowing the branches you don't want; or to slow or "dwarf" the development of a tree or branch, pruning should be done soon after seasonal growth is complete. The reason for the slowing effect is that you reduce the total leaf surface, thereby reducing the amount of food manufactured and sent to the roots for their development and next year's growth of the crown. Another reason to prune in the summer is for corrective purposes. Defective limbs can be seen more easily, or limbs that hang down too far under the weight of leaves.

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Flowering Trees If your purpose for pruning is to enhance flowering: 1. For trees or shrubs that bloom in summer or fall on *current* year's growth (e.g., crape myrtle), prune in winter. 2. For trees that bloom in spring from buds on one-year-old wood (e.g., dogwood and flowering fruit trees), prune when their flowers fade.

Caution: In some areas of the country, diseases or insect occurrence may be affected by the time of pruning. Check with your county extension agent or city forester, or an arborist or nursery operator to see if there are any local problems.