



Alamance Gardener

Alamance County Cooperative Extension Horticulture Department

Coming Events

Workshops and Demonstrations



Thu., Feb. 4, 10:00a DEMO at BSF*

Fruit Tree Pruning with Mike Parker

Thu., Feb 11, 10:00a DEMO at BSF*

Grapevine Pruning With Andy Zeman

Thu., Mar. 4, 10:00a DEMO at CES*

Pruning Woody Ornamentals

Thu., Mar. 18, 10:00a - ONLINE

Healing Gardens

*BSF Pruning demos will be at Buster Sykes Demonstration Farm, 2430 Turner Road, Mebane, NC. Pruning Ornamentals class will be held outdoors at the Agricultural Building (address below)., Healing Gardens class will be held via Zoom.

Registration is required for all classes. Register here:

<https://alamance.ces.ncsu.edu/>

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The Pruning Issue



To prune or not to prune? That is the question.

The easiest answer is that most pruning of trees and shrubs is unnecessary for the health of the plant. Some ill-considered pruning can be downright unhealthy.

Pruning is an invigorating activity—and not just because it gets you some exercise out in the fresh air after being cooped up all winter. Pruning is also invigorating to plants, encouraging them to put on new growth as the sap rises.

So, other than for exercise, why prune?

Fruit-producing trees and plants such as apples, peaches, grapes and blueberries require some thoughtful pruning this time of year to improve fruit production. Attend our live demonstrations at Buster Sykes Farm to see how to correctly prune these plants.

Most of your ornamental trees and shrubs, if they are the right size for their location in your yard, need never be pruned, except for the occasional broken branch.



Cut That, Not This

What NOT to prune

As a rule of thumb, early spring blooming plants should not be pruned until after they have flowered. This includes azaleas and rhododendrons, forsythia, flowering quince, Japanese camellias and other early bloomers. Pruning these plants now will probably not harm the plants, but will reduce their booming as their flower buds were formed last summer.

Some hydrangeas bloom on last year's wood and have already formed flower buds for this year. These include oak-leaf hydrangeas (named for the shape of their leaves), and so-called big-leaf hydrangeas—mophead and lacecap—these are the hydrangeas that have flower heads in shades of blue to purple to pink.

Most cone-producing evergreens should not be pruned (this includes junipers and other evergreens which have cones that resemble berries). These plants lack the adventitious buds that allow so many other plants to grow new leaves and branches even when they are pruned to bare stems.

OK to prune

Broadleaf evergreen shrubs such as boxwood and holly may be pruned to reduce size by as much as 1/3, even if this brings them down to bare branches. Boxwoods are slow to recover from such treatment, but they will be back. If you are counting on hollies to produce berries, a severe pruning will reduce the fruit set for the current year, but fruit should return by the next year. Gardenias bloom on old as well as new wood. Wait until March to prune out any freeze-damaged branches as needed.

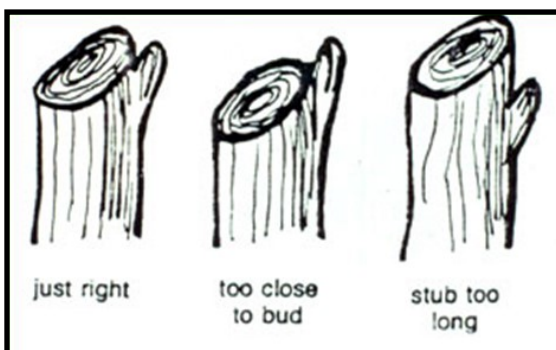
Deciduous shrubs that bloom on wood that grows this year. This includes panicle (peegee) hydrangeas like Limelight and smooth hydrangeas such as Annabelle. American beautyberry and butterfly bush are other common deciduous shrubs that can be pruned now to promote bushy growth and control size. These shrubs can be cut back to around 12 inches. Remove any old limbs to the ground.

Roses. Hybrid tea, floribunda and shrub roses should be pruned to an open center about 18 inches tall. Remove crossed canes and cut the remaining canes to an outside bud.

Lady Banks rose is a special case, blooming just once a year in spring. Save the pruning until after bloom.

Crapemyrtle. A popular “murder” victim, probably because it will survive most any hatchet job. But, if your crapemyrtles are too big for the space, you should be aware that there are crapemyrtle varieties that mature anywhere from four feet tall to forty feet tall—there's a crapemyrtle just right for your space! If you want to prune to keep them in shape, cut any offending branch back to a joint

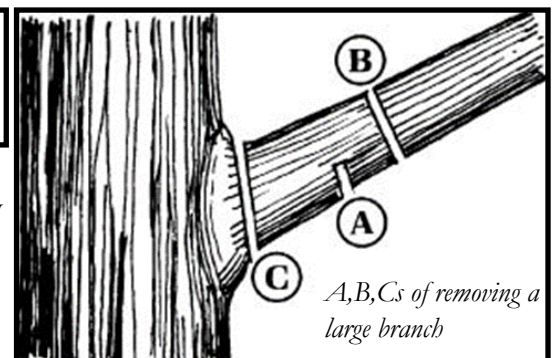
We will have an outdoor demonstration of pruning woody ornamentals on Thursday March 4th at Arbor Gate Teaching Garden at the Agricultural Building. Registration is required (see page 1).



Proper cuts to trim shrubs or remove a large branch

If you're in doubt about how or when to make the cuts, give me a call!

-Chris



NC STATE**Extension
Master Gardener***February Garden Tips*

Put in an asparagus patch now. Prepare the bed well, because asparagus is a perennial vegetable that will produce for many years, given a good home. Select a male hybrid, such as Jersey Giant or Jersey Gem. This way, no energy will be wasted on seed production. Plant 1- or 2-year-old crowns, but wait until next year to begin a limited harvest.

Plant potatoes, broccoli and onion sets and seeds of carrots, cabbage, onions, peas, radishes, rutabagas, spinach and turnips.

You may fertilize trees and shrubs this month, if needed. In general, if trees and shrubs are growing at a rate that is acceptable to you and the foliage looks healthy, there is no need to fertilize. Excessive fertilizer can cause rank growth and create more pruning chores, which, in itself, is invigorating to the plant.

Grapes and large fruit trees should be pruned this month to enhance fruit production, remove unwanted growth and improve framework. Attend one of our free pruning demonstrations

this month to learn the best way to improve your fruit yields. See page 1 for days and times.

Spray wild onion and wild garlic in lawns with a broadleaf herbicide. Be sure to read the label on the product you use and follow the directions carefully. Keep in mind that most of these products work best when air temperature is between 50 and 80 degrees as that is when the weeds are actively growing and will take up the material. You will want to add a spreader-sticker to the spray mix to help the herbicide adhere to those skinny, slippery leaves.

You can divide perennials now as the tips emerge. Daylilies, Siberian iris, hostas, and shasta daisies are a few to divide and replant now. Daylilies, especially, will benefit from division every few years. Spread them around your garden or pass the divisions along to friends.

Trim back ornamental grasses this month. Muhlenbergia, Miscanthus, Pennisetum and other grasses will have a fresher look come spring if old foliage is cut back now.

The trick is to cut only the old foliage and avoid nipping the new growth tips. So, check before cutting. If new growth has begun, adjust cutting height accordingly. Although not a grass, Liriope (also known as "Monkey Grass") should be cut back now, too. This is easily done with your lawn mower. Set the blade high and go!

Sedges and other grass-like ground covers such as dwarf Mondo should be cut back only if the old foliage is looking ragged. These plants are a bit slower to recover.

Draw up a layout for your vegetable garden. Try to rotate vegetable crops so that the same families of plants are not growing in the same spot year after year. A five-year rotation is ideal to reduce plant-specific pest and disease populations, but if that's not practical for you, a rotation of as little as three years would still be helpful. Remember that cabbage, broccoli, turnips, collards, Brussels sprouts, kale, kohlrabi and cauliflower are all in the same family! Another popular vegetable family includes potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants and peppers.

Arbor Gate Plant of the Month



Japanese Camellia

Camellia japonica

Just as you begin to despair that winter may never end, *Camellia japonica* bursts into bloom with big, bold flowers in shades of pink and white. Partial shade is the ideal, but this plant can stand some sun and still grow and bloom in the shade of deciduous trees. Like all camellias, acidic soil (a pH of less than 6) is best, and our soils here lean naturally that way. A moist, humus-y soil that drains well would be perfect, but *Camellia japonica* can even withstand wet conditions (good news this winter!) Not only do these beautiful flowers serve as a nectar source for pollinators venturing out on a warm winter day, but migrating songbirds often dive in for tiny insects. Varieties range in size from four to twelve feet tall at maturity, and some begin blooming as early as December and continue until April.

Be sure to plant this outstanding evergreen where you can see it from a window during the doldrums of winter.

Read more here:

https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/find_a_plant/?q=camellia+japonica

