



Pumpkin Brook Organic Gardening, Inc.

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Greetings,

It has often been said that timing is everything. Nowhere could this be truer than in a garden. We don't plant tulip bulbs in the spring, we plant them in the fall because they need time in the soil to overwinter and develop before they bloom in spring. As obvious as this may sound, too often we forget to listen to nature about the timing of performing various tasks in the garden. Whether one is dividing, weeding, pruning, deadheading, fertilizing, pinching back, or treating pest and disease outbreaks there is a certain time to perform all of these tasks.

Why We Prune

Pruning is a horticultural technique that involves selectively removing specific plant parts to maintain the health and aesthetic structure of the plant.

We often get phone calls from homeowners who have waited too long to prune. Their shrub or tree has grown out of its intended space or has become diseased as a result of neglect. Pruning should be seen as a regular aspect of maintenance and not a corrective fix. Shrubs and trees can be one of the biggest investments you can make in your landscape, and preventatively maintaining the health of this asset is well worth it in the long run.



Jarrod prunes a crab apple tree

Many people mistakenly think that pruning is done strictly for aesthetic reasons to give shape to a shrub or tree. But there are actually many other reasons why we prune:



Healthy, well-pruned shrubs



Lisa prunes a shrub

- 1. To enhance the health and vigor of the plant:**
Pruning for plant health involves the elimination of dead, dying, rubbing, crossing or diseased wood. A dying branch can be an entry way for insects and diseases that could spread to other parts of the plant. Thinning out the shrub can increase air circulation which will create conditions that are less friendly to disease causing insects and fungi. It will also allow more sunlight to penetrate the internal part of the shrub thereby enhancing foliar growth throughout. Pruning can also stimulate new growth near or below the pruning cut. Sometimes pruning can be employed to help a plant recover from construction damage or natural "winter kill."
- 2. To enhance its function in the landscape:**
Various shrubs can have different functions in the landscape. While some shrubs are grown for their flowers (ex: Rhododendrons) others are grown for their stems (Red Twig Dogwood) and others for their berries (Beautyberry). Pruning can be implemented to help the plant give the best "show" possible. Rhododendrons can be pruned to reduce density so that energy is diverted into the production of fewer but larger flowers. Old growth on red twig dogwoods can be pruned out so that the newer more colorful stems are prominent. Cutting back beautyberry in the spring will produce more attractive berries on an upright plant in the fall. Pruning can also be implemented to create a special effect such as an espalier or a formal hedge.
- 3. To restore the original design intent or improve appearance:** If a shrub has been well maintained, pruning should be somewhat inconspicuous. The natural shape of the plant should be maintained and "lollipop" style shrubs should be avoided. Not only can this unnatural style of pruning be tacky, it is also bad for the plant causing new growth to condense at the edges while the interior becomes barren. Pruning can be done to control size while keeping the proper scale in reference to the surroundings. Unwanted suckers and branches should be removed as they can detract from appearance and create unnecessary energy draws on the plant.
- 4. For safety to protect people and property:**
One of the most common pruning situations we find is shrubs that are too close to the house. Branches that rub up against the house bring

moisture with them and can contribute to rotting. For this reason it is very important to keep shrubs pruned off the house. Large dead or weak branches that hang over a house or overhead wires should also be removed to prevent construction damage and dangerous electrical hazards. For security purposes large shrubs or tree branches should be pulled away from obscuring the view to entry points in the home as this can be a welcome sign for burglars. Sometimes we come across large shrubs at the edge of a driveway that may interfere with either pedestrian or vehicle traffic and these shrubs should be pruned back hard too.

Proper pruning can make a huge difference in the overall feel of your landscape! We have a very knowledgeable and well trained staff who will take great care to maintain the naturalistic shape of your plants. If you think your shrubs or small trees may be in need of pruning, call us at (978) 597-3005 to schedule a time.

What Is that White Fluffy Pest on my Hollies?

Cottony camellia scale *Pulvinaria floccifera* is a soft scale that sucks sap from the leaves of many common landscape plants. Although it is

most often seen on hollies it can also be found on camellia, yew, euonymus, maple, English ivy, hydrangea, and rhododendron. Scale will excrete "honeydew" a sticky substance that attracts stinging insects and creates optimal conditions for black sooty mold. Sooty mold will cover the leaves making it difficult for the plant to photosynthesize.



Example of leaf damage



White cottony ovisacs

Adult females are about 1/8 inch long, oval and tan in color with a brown outline. They lay white cottony ovisacs containing hundreds of eggs on the undersides of leaves in May. Throughout June the eggs emerge into crawlers. Scale crawlers will be about the size of a mite and amber in color. This period is the only mobile stage in the insect's life and is also when the insect is most vulnerable since it has not yet

developed a hard outer shell.

Timing is everything and for this reason we like to spray an organic insecticide, Aza-Direct® exactly at this time in the lifecycle. Pruning out severely diseased branches can also increase air circulation and create conditions that do not favor sooty mold development. Adjusting the soil pH and soil microbiology through amendments can also go a long way in restoring balance.

It may take several seasons to completely control a scale infestation. In severe cases, we will recommend removing the plant. But with a continued treatment plan of proper soil pH, developing microbiology, pruning, and organic insecticide, over time the health of the plant can be restored.

Andromeda Lacebug: A Pest to Know

Andromeda lacebug or *Stephanitis takeyai* is a common pest of Japanese Andromedas (*Pieris japonica*). It is appropriately named because of the flat lacelike wings found on adults. It originated in Japan with its host plant but has since migrated to other areas of the world due to the nursery trade.



Lacebug damage

The lifecycle begins as the egg overwinters within the leaf tissue of the *Pieris* leaves. The egg remains somewhat protected behind a dark varnish like drop of excrement or "honeydew."



Yellowing of leaves caused by Andromeda lacebug damage

The black spiny nymph develops in early June and begins to feed immediately, sucking out sap from the undersides of leaves. It takes approximately a month for the nymphs to reach the adult stage. The cycle begins again as adults lay eggs near the midrib on the bottom of leaves.



Excrement spotting on underside of leaf

Feeding injury is commonly seen on the upper leaf surface as yellow stippling. Other signs of infestation can include: adult insects, excrement spotting on the undersides of leaves, white cast off skins, and black sooty mold that moves in on top of honeydew. As a result of leaf damage, photosynthesis can be compromised thereby reducing needed food for the

plant. In severe cases leaves may become yellowish grey and drop from the plant. There may also be a reduction in flower production the following spring. Damage is often worse on plants sited in full sun.

Prevention strategies include planting resistant varieties of *Pieris* (ex: *Pieris floribunda* or Mountain Andromeda) and siting shrubs in part shade. We also encourage adjusting soil pH and microbiology through amendments to restore balance. Treatment with organic insecticides and horticultural oils is best done in early to mid June as nymphs emerge. Repeat applications during the summer may be necessary to keep the population in check.

Plant Pick - A Lovely Bellflower

A welcome sight each June is the *Campanula punctata* 'Rubriflora'. The flowers are striking tubular bells, carried on long arching stems. They look hand painted! Look for narrow, cream colored bells, tinged purple with bright red flecks inside. It is 10 inches tall and tolerates part sun. You may want to add this superb plant to your garden.



Campanula punctata 'Rubriflora'

June Is the Time for....

Pinching Back: Pinching back refers to the act of reducing a perennial's height before bloom to create a vigorous upright plant. June is a great time to pinch back Chrysanthemums, Salvia, Sedum, Monkshood, Aster, and Joe Pye Weed to keep plants from getting too tall and floppy. If this is done too late, flowering can be impeded. If it is not done at all, plants can fall over and become unattractive.



Asters that have been pinched back

Deadheading: June is also a good time to keep up on deadheading with salvia and other spring blooming perennials to encourage rebloom. Deadheaded perennials not only look better due to removal of dead spent flowers, but they also perform better, producing larger, repeat blooms.

Disarm Control: Shrubs should be checked at this time



Peggy deadheads the roses



Carmine sprays Aza-Direct®

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Disease Control: Shrubs should be checked at this time of year for two spotted spider mite, aphids, Camellia scale, and Andromeda lace bug. Horticultural oils and organic insecticides should be applied at the time that pests are in their most vulnerable stage, usually the nymph stage.

Pruning: Spring flowering shrubs (ex: Azaleas, Rhododendrons, Lilacs and Forsythia) should be pruned immediately after they bloom. Pruning is best done immediately after flowering so that one does not end up cutting off any buds for next year's bloom.

Weeding: The cool moist weather this spring has encouraged the germination of weed seeds. It is best to pull common weeds before they flower and go to seed. Otherwise, you will be fighting off many more weeds for years to come! Also, smaller weeds require less effort to dig out and performing this task now will save time down the road. Mulch any areas with bare soil to keep weeds at bay.

Please call Pumpkin Brook as soon as you see any damage to your valuable plants. We can help. Enjoy the good weather and the 4th of July.

Sincerely,
Priscilla



Try it FREE today.