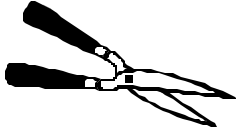


TO PRUNE OR NOT TO PRUNE IS THAT THE QUESTION?



On sunny days in February, We always have that urge to pick up the heavy garden clippers and a saw and head for the nearest shrub or tree. February typically is the proper month for pruning but we need to remember pruning is both a skill and an art. The skill is in proper cuts that will allow the plant to heal from the cut and prosper afterwards. The art is in making cuts that will allow the plant to attain its potential beauty and/or produce an optimum crop. Just as there is a right way to prune, we often see many examples of the wrong way to prune. Topping the plants or removing all of the top growth at a certain height is one of the most commonly practiced **WRONG** ways to prune. This creates a weaker plant and it makes the plant look terrible. So, do we really need to prune? Here are some thoughts on the “Why, When, Where and How” of pruning.

WHY PRUNE: No matter how much or how little pruning you do on an established plant, the object of pruning is to modify the plant’s growth. The pruning should be done for one of the following reasons:

- To maintain plant health by removing dead, diseased or injured wood.
- To control or direct growth
- To increase quality or yield of flowers or fruit.

“Pruning for pruning sake” is not a viable gardening principle.

WHEN TO PRUNE: Each type of plant and each reason for pruning requires a different pruning time. If a plant has been injured or disease is apparent, then **NOW** is the time to prune. Other reasons for pruning require different time periods. You should never prune a deciduous tree or shrub in the fall when it is shedding leaves as this send a message to the plant to put out new growth. Most spring flowering shrubs should be pruned immediately **after** they have finished blooming.

WHERE AND HOW TO PRUNE There are different methods that results in effective pruning and each method depends upon the plant to be pruned and the reason for pruning. Pinching out new growth before it elongates into stems is a gentle way of pruning. Heading back is called for when the pinching stage is passed. Thinning and shearing are more aggressive forms of pruning; these require consideration of the plant and how the cuts are made.

For more information on pruning and pruning calendars for specific trees and shrubs, contact the Chesapeake Office of Virginia Cooperative Extension at 382-6348. So before you grab those pruning shears, learn the details. Your plants will be healthier, look better, and you will be happier.