When is the Best Time to Prune or Plant Trees & Shrubs

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As we move from fall to winter, many people will be going out and beginning to prune trees & shrubs in their landscapes. Generally pruning of all trees & shrubs should take place in late Fall and winter while plants are dormant. The best pruning of these should be done in late November or early December. Plus, these fresh cuts will provide fee decorations they you can use to "spruce-up" your home for the "holly-days" inside and outside. Remember, do not prune your plants while the wood is frozen.

Listed below are a few general rules which can be used:

- Prune with clean-cutting tools. Four tools will serve for almost any job: hand shears, loppers, hedge shears and a saw
- Cut limbs back to a side branch on evergreens. This is not necessary for most flowering shrubs.
- Never remove all foliage (or leaf-bearing branches) from evergreens. While some kinds of privet can stand this treatment, most cannot. Most flowering shrubs can stand to be cut from 6 inches to 2-3 feet high or lower if such treatment is required.
- When cutting evergreens back to control size, try to retain the natural shape of the shrub. Artificial shapes seldom make for an attractive landscape.
- Prune plants every year if they need it. Try to avoid letting shrubs get too big before cutting them back. Heavy pruning is not only hard on young plants, but often leaves them with a "butchered" appearance.

Not only are people thinking about pruning plants, others are thinking about planting trees & shrubs. There are several things' homeowners need to consider when one think about planting. One of the objectives of homeowners should be to minimize the amount of energy required to maintain the landscape. To reach this goal, it requires careful planning both before and after installation of plants.

Most of the problems seemingly caused by trees & shrubs actually are caused by people using the wrong plants. Some criteria in the selection process are:

- Plant size – Select plants that grow to a size that best serves the landscape function. For example, use very low shrubs for a ground cover but tall ones for privacy. Realize that the single biggest problem in landscapes is that plants get too large for the space allotted to them. Accordingly, most pruning is done to control size.
- Decide if evergreen or deciduous shrubs are needed. Know something about the exposure where shrubs are to be planted and realize that some shrubs grow best in shade, some grow best in sun, and other may not be very particular.

- Know your soil and realize that some shrubs require a well-drained soil and others don't mind wet soils. Some plants prefer and acid soil but most prefer a soil only slightly acid.
- Rate of Growth – Fast-growing plants are usually the cheapest to purchase. This can be good when fast-growing plants are required but bad if it cause excessive pruning.
- Management – Plants should be selected for reasonably carefree maintenance. Buy plants that not prone to insect, disease or similar problems.
- Price – many things contribute to the retail price of plants but the price tag alone is not a good criterion as to what to buy. Some things that contribute to price are:
  - Popularity of plant and demand
  - Rate of growth – slow-growing types usually cost more.
  - Patented plants always cost a little more.
  - Quality of plant, including health, form and ability to live after transplanting
  - Time on market. Newly released plants usually cost more.
  - Guarantee and services provided by dealer.
  - Ease and method of propagation. Plants easily propagated may cost less.
  - Those that must be budded or grafted may cost more.

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