

As we enter the planting season for trees and shrubs, there are some things homeowners need to consider. One of the objectives of homeowners should be to minimize the amount of energy required to maintain the landscape. To reach this goal requires careful planning both before and after installation of plants.

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



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- 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 plant 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 (Aucuba), some grow best in sun (Junipers), and others may not be very particular (Boxwood.)
- Know your soil and realize that some shrubs require a well-drained soil (Azaleas.) Some don't mind wet soils some prefer an acid soil (Azaleas and Rhododendrons), but most of our shrubs prefer a soil only slightly acid.
- Rate of Growth - Fast-growing plants are usually the cheapest to buy. This can be good when fast-growing plants are required but bad if it will simply cause excessive pruning.
- Management - Plants should be selected for reasonably carefree maintenance. Buy plants that are 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 plant to buy.

Many people will be going out and beginning to prune trees and shrubs in their landscape. Generally pruning of all trees and shrubs should take place in late February or early March

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before new growth begins except for spring-flowering plants, which should be pruned immediately after flowering. The same is true for evergreens; however, pruning these during late November or early December, as emphasized in earlier articles, will provide you with fresh, free decorations that you can use to "spruce-up" your home for the "holly-days" inside and outside. Remember, you do not want to prune your trees or shrubs while the wood is frozen.

The exact methods of pruning are not easily translated into words. It is usually necessary to learn pruning from someone who fully understands the rules and techniques. Listed below are a few generalized 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 drastic 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 back. Heavy pruning is not only hard on the plant, but often leaves the shrubs with a "butchered" appearance.

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