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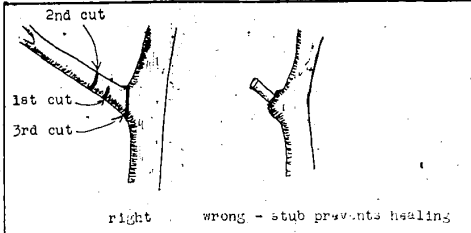
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Suburban Gardener

Too Soon To Plant? Do A Little Pruning

By BETTY FRANKEL
Special Writer

Pruning is both an art and a science.

Pruning is done to remove broken or diseased branches, to improve the shape or form of a tree or shrub, and to keep it from outgrowing its allotted space.

Pruning can also be used to rejuvenate an old shrub, and to increase flower and fruit production. Also, when a woody plant is transplanted the top should be pruned back to compensate for roots lost or damaged during the move.

PRUNING CAN be done at almost any time during the year, but early spring is a good time.

The gardener who is lured outside by a sunny day can improve his plants and do necessary pruning when it is too soon to do any planting. In general the rule to follow is to prune summer flowering shrubs, which bloom on new growth produced this year, in early spring.

Early bloomers, such as forsythia, should be pruned after blooming so as not to sacrifice any blooms. Needle evergreens can be pruned at any time, but if they are pruned just before growth begins in May they will look shorn and stiff for the least amount of time.

Trees can be pruned now, too, but it is better to wait until later in the season to prune large limbs from trees with a heavy flow of sap. Included in this category are maples and birches.

THE TOOLS NEEDED are pruning shears that should be kept well sharpened and oiled and a pruning saw. A saw with a slender curved blade is most useful. Although less essential, a long-handled lopping shears and long-handled pruners are helpful for reaching into tall trees.

When pruning large branches use a pruning saw and plan to make three cuts. This three-cut procedure will prevent damage to the tree from bark ripping if a heavy branch falls.

Make the first cut in the underside of the branch about a foot from the trunk, sawing about half way through. Make the second cut three or four inches further out on the limb, sawing from above until the branch is cut off. The final cut is made to remove the stub as close to the trunk as possible.

WHEN PRUNING small branches or twigs from trees or shrubs make a clean, slanting cut with life pruning shears or saw. Cut just above a bud. If the bud faces outward, future growth will be directed out and the tree or shrub will develop an open, more spreading form.

If the bud faces toward the center of the plant, the growth will be inward and the plant will remain more compact. So consider the form you want the tree or shrub to assume before deciding where to prune.

When pruning trees and shrubs don't shear off all the branches to an even length unless a stiff, architectural form is desired for a hedge. In

other cases retain the natural form of the plant.

PRUNING CAN be used to rejuvenate an old shrub that has become a tangle of woody stems that produce few flowers or that have grown too large for the space in which the shrub is growing. The stems can be cut off near ground level and new ones will grow.

The procedure is less drastic if three years are allowed for the renewal and only one third of the stems are cut each year. This system works well with old lilacs, honeysuckle or other large shrubs that are very long lived.

To prevent flowering shrubs from reaching the old and overgrown stage it is good procedure to remove one or two woody old stems each year.

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