**Pruning Hurts**

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February is the best month for pruning most plants in the landscape.

Freeze-killed Tops: Begin with the freeze killed stems of lantana, salvia, duranta, firebrush, esperanza, and other cold-sensitive plants. In most cases, the best advice is to cut the stems to ground level. This winter, because the temperatures did not dip much below freezing, some stems may not have died to the ground. By leaving the live wood, the plant will have a head start and probably bloom faster than a completely cut back plant.

Stems of esperanza and duranta of the plants listed are most likely to have survived complete freeze back.

Fruit Trees and Roses: Fruit trees and roses are what we primarily think of when the topic of pruning is considered. Pruning in this case is necessary to stimulate new growth, open up the plant to air movement to control size and for pest control.

There is some flexibility based on the differing growth habits of some fruit trees and/or the space you have available, but otherwise most of us prune hybrid tea roses, peaches and plums in a similar manner.

* Dead and distressed wood is removed.
* The 3-4 main stems radiate from the center at about 60 degrees to form a cup.
* The middles are opened up to allow air movement.
* It is especially important on fruit trees not to strip all small stems off. “Trashy” middles allow some protection from sunburn.
* Reduce height in roses to about 3 feet and about 10 feet in fruit trees.

Diagrams: Describing how to prune is difficult. It is easier for most of us to use diagrams along with the instructions. Visit plantanswers.com and click to pruning of the particular plant variety for diagrams to supplement this text.

Crepe Myrtle: The attitude towards pruning crepe myrtles has changed. They also bloom on new growth wood like peaches or roses but most horticulturalists now think that the severe pruning imposed on crepe myrtles is not necessary. Most crepe myrtles produce enough new wood each year for good bloom without reducing the plant to a skeleton of stubs each year. Crepe myrtles will survive and even bloom well with the savage pruning that they can be subjected to, but it is not necessary.

Hedges: The healthiest hedges are those where only a portion of the year’s new growth is renewed by shearing or pruning cuts. The remaining foliage must be adequate to support the plant. For the conifers that are hedged, it is especially important to wait until after the flush of new growth has occurred. Half of the new growth is then removed with hedging cuts.

Early bloomers: Wait until after early blooming plants bloom to avoid removing all the bloom wood. Climbing roses, Texas mountain laurel, redbuds and Lady Banks roses are in this category.

Shade Trees: It is usually best to let a professional tree maintenance company prune shade trees. They trees are valuable assets and it is worth it to prune them in a way that preserves their beauty and maintains their health. Topping a tree is always inappropriate.

In addition to tree health, letting a professional prune your shade trees is advisable for your health. Pruning a tall tree is dangerous. Select an arborist with a good reputation. Ask for references and proof of insurance.