

## Tree Pruning in Urban Areas: Part 1

As an UF/IFAS Extension Agent I am often asked by clients when to prune and how to prune trees in their landscape. Also, driving around our cities we often see the crape myrtle wacked to the trunks which is commonly referred to as “crape murder”. Yes there is a right and wrong way to prune and there is a time to prune specific plants.

Sometimes, we must prune plants that are planted too close to walkways or drives and interfere with traffic flow. Vigorous growing plants often require pruning to maintain a desired size or shape and to keep them within the scale of the surrounding landscape. This reminds us of the right place right plant Florida Landscaping principle.

A good pruning rule to follow is that trees and shrubs that flower before the end of June should be pruned immediately after flowering. If pruned before spring flowering, the flower buds will be removed, thus eliminating flowering. Those which flower after the end of June should be pruned in winter.

Please note that pruning is not to be confused with removing dead blooms. Dead blooms and dead limbs can be removed at any time. Sometimes we prune to remove dead, diseased or damaged wood from plants. For example, Bot Canker disease infecting Leyland Cypress trees and causing selected branches to turn brown and die. Some trees, like ornamental crabapples and plums, form vigorous upright shoots, called water sprouts, from their main branches. These detract from the appearance of the tree and are best pruned out when they are young.

Once you establish a reason for pruning, then it's important to know the three T's for proper pruning: using the right *tool* for the pruning task, using the correct *technique* to accomplish your objective, and pruning at the right *time* to minimize cold damage or to avoid removing flower buds.

For clean cuts, always use the right tool for each pruning task. For cuts pencil size or smaller, use hand pruners. There are two basic types of hand pruners: scissor-cut pruners and anvil-cut pruners. Scissor-cut pruners have two sharpened blades that cut like scissors, while anvil-cut pruners have one cutting blade and a flat, anvil-like surface that the blade cuts against. Scissor-cut pruners are better for herbaceous stems since the anvil-cut shears tend to crush the tissue. Loppers, or lopping shears, are used to cut branches larger than a pencil up to two inches in diameter.

There are two basic types of pruning techniques; heading and thinning. Heading is the indiscriminate cutting of branches back to the same level. Shearing is an example of heading. Many small-leaf evergreen shrubs are sheared in the landscape. Thinning, on the other hand, refers to the removal of selected branches within the canopy back to the main trunk, a side branch or bud. Heading results in a more formal appearance while thinning results in more informal appearance.

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