

The week ahead

TUESDAY HEALTHY LIVING

HEART HEALTH: Our special section explores the best ways to keep your heart in top condition

WEDNESDAY TASTE

WINE PANEL: What goes with crème caramel? Our tasters pick wines that'll seduce your sweetheart over dessert

NEXT WEEK HOME

THE CEDARS: In this urban neighborhood, artists and entrepreneurs find a home in the old Piggly-Wiggly building

Today on dallasnews.com

Eat better, live longer

♣ **Online:** Check out our recipes database, which includes new healthful meals to try, including these Salmon Tacos. ▶
dallasnews.com/healthyrecipes



Football food

♣ **Online:** Get ready for the Super Bowl, with recipes for dips, snacks, chili and soups.
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Which pet is the cutest?

☑ **Survey:** Are any of this week's pets cuter than yours? Vote for your favorite and send in your own pet's photo.
dallasnews.com/pets

HOME

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CHORES



When pruning tree branches of 3 inches in diameter or less, make the first cut from the bottom, halfway into the branch and a few inches from the trunk or larger branch.



Make the second cut from the top, finishing the first cut made from the bottom.



The third and final cut is to prune the branch at the collar.

FILE 2004/Staff photos

How (and when) you should prune trees

By **RICK ROSEN**
Staff Writer
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Before you prune your trees this winter, determine whether you *should* prune.

Pruning can tame a tree that is outgrowing its location, and it can get rid of weak limbs that look as though they might fall. Pruning diseased limbs can prevent the disease from spreading. And pruning allows you to train the tree into a desired shape.

Done improperly, though, pruning can destroy the natural beauty of a tree. And heavy pruning can leave a tree weak, susceptible to disease or insect pests.

There is a difference between pruning and removing dead limbs. Deadwood can be removed at any time of the year, tree experts say. If you are not sure whether a limb is dead, scratch off a bit of bark with the blade of a hand pruner or your fingernail; living branches will be green underneath.

Winter is a good time to get rid of deadwood, because deciduous trees have dropped their leaves, allowing easy access to the limbs.

Because they are dormant, it also is a good time for pruning.

Before you start lopping off branches, step back and look at your tree. Visualize the shape you want it to be. (Of course, you should know what that particular tree's natural shape is.) And remember to

prune with a light hand.

Here are pruning tips from Texas AgriLife Extension Service (formerly Texas Cooperative Extension):

- Start by removing dead, broken or diseased limbs. Cut them back from a lateral branch (a strong branch originating from the main trunk). This frequently opens up the canopy enough so no other pruning is needed.

- Eliminate weak or narrow crotches, where two branches connect. Angles less than 45 degrees are at risk of breaking. Another way to picture it: As you face your tree, look at it as a clock face; the 10 and the 2 are at about 45 degrees.

- If two main trunks are growing, consider cutting one off. A tree with one trunk generally is a stronger tree.

- When cutting off diseased limbs, disinfect blades between each cut with alcohol or heavily diluted bleach.

- Make sure blades are sharp. Clean cuts encourage rapid healing.

- Pruning paint or other dressings are not necessary and may even slow down healing of the pruned area. The exception: on oak trees in areas where oak wilt disease is common.

- Use a three-part cut for big branches, those larger than 1½ inches in diameter. First, saw under the branch, 6 to 12 inches out from the trunk; cut about one-third of the way through the branch. Second, cut through the branch at an angle from the top. Last, cut any stub back

to the collar, which is a raised area that surrounds where two branches meet.

- Speaking of the collar, avoid causing a serious tree wound — don't cut large limbs flush with the trunk; always remove them at the collar.

One pruning practice to discard is "topping," in which trees are severely cut back. You see this particularly with crape myrtles. However, tree experts unite in discouraging the practice, believing it weakens the tree and ruins its shape.

And it's probably too early to trim fruit trees. The experts say to wait until late winter, just before bud break. Prune too early and a late freeze could cause severe damage. (The average date of the last freeze in our area is March 13.)

The best way to reduce the need for pruning is by placing the proper tree in the proper spot. If you know before you buy what the mature size of a tree will be, you'll be able to just sit and watch when your neighbors are pulling out their chainsaws.

PRUNING TOOLS

- Hand pruners can be used for twigs.
- Good lopping shears can cut limbs up to 2 inches.
- Saws are also helpful.
- Pole pruners let you reach high up.
- Other tools, particularly chainsaws, can be dangerous. Homeowners generally leave jobs that need chainsaws to professionals.

Is poison ivy dangerous when dormant?

I have a bumper crop of poison ivy. How do I get rid of this stuff? Is it still active at this time of year?

J.C., Plano

You can get a bad poison ivy rash if you touch the dormant stems, especially if they scratch your skin. Ask me how I know!

I don't recommend chemical herbicides, and they don't work on dormant plants. You can hire a landscape contractor to remove the vines, roots and all. Most landscape companies have employees who can work safely around poison ivy.

Can I get a test for toxic contaminants in soil? I think land that I own has contamination about 12 to 18 inches beneath the surface.

H.G., Dallas

A soil-testing lab should be able to help you. Some environmental engineers work with those issues, too.

I am getting ready to prepare a new spot for a vegetable garden. Can I transplant the sod from that area to bare spots in the lawn? What about bed prep? Do you recommend double digging?

R.L., Irving

The grass can be transplanted now, but don't let it dry out during or after moving it.

Double digging is too much trouble. The bed preparation I recommend is as follows:

Scrape away weeds and grass and toss the weeds into the compost pile. Transplant the grass elsewhere or compost it.

Don't till the area before removing the grass and weeds or you'll drive the reproductive part of the grass into the garden soil and create a big problem.

Next, spread a thick layer of compost across the bed area (4 inches deep for ground cover, 6 inches deep for shrubs and vines, and up to 8 inches deep for perennials, roses and vegetables).

Add an organic fertilizer at a rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet, lava sand at 10 pounds per 100 square feet, a 1-inch layer of expanded shale and 20 pounds each of dry molasses and horticultural cornmeal.

Till this mixture into the garden soil to a depth of about 8 to 10 inches.

Now, you are ready to plant. Spread a thick layer of mulch around transplants and seedlings when they are large enough. Cover the bare soil around larger plants with shredded native tree trimmings.

ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT
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When I was visiting Dallas recently, a friend gave me a potted Italian stone pine. We live west of the continental divide in Montana at an elevation of about 3,400 feet. Our winter weather is moderate, with about one to 10 days a year when the temperature drops to between 0 and -10 F. I would like to plant the tree outdoors. Would it survive in this climate? If not, what time of year can I put it outside?

B.M., Missoula, MT

Italian stone pine (*Pinus pinea*) is one of my favorite trees, but it probably will freeze in your area. The hardiness zone in Dallas is 8, and that's about as far north as it will survive.

You'll need to keep it mobile in a large pot and move it to a protected area when the temperature drops into the teens.

My cocker spaniel has hot spots. Do you have any suggestions for eliminating or soothing these irritated areas?

J.L., Dallas

Comfrey tea can be applied topically for dog skin allergies. Cook comfrey greens, dilute the cool pot liquor to a light iced-tea color and pour or dab it onto the hot spots. Comfrey is powerful, so don't use it more than once a month and only when needed.

Cornmeal juice also is good and can be used more often. Soak a cup of whole ground cornmeal in a 5-gallon bucket of water, strain out the solids and apply the liquid to the dog's skin.

Bathing dogs in herbal shampoos that contain orange oil (d-Limonene) and tea tree oil (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) also helps. Dry horticultural cornmeal or whole ground cornmeal dusted onto the irritated skin is helpful if the problem is fungal.

RESOURCES

ONLINE: www.dirtdoctor.com for free organic-program handouts

RADIO: KSKY-AM (660), Saturday 11 a.m.-noon and Sunday 8-11 a.m. www.ksky.com.

MAIL: P.O. Box 140650, Dallas, TX 75214

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