

We are starting to warm up, and it is time to get busy in our yards. It can sometimes be overwhelming knowing where to get started. Some things to do include pruning shrubs, roses, fruit trees and raspberries.

Often times when we prune, we do not know exactly what to do, and so we try for something that looks good. This often involves giving a shrub a buzzcut. However, this is not recommended, because, over time, it removes too much of a shrub's leaf producing wood and impacts health and makes them look thin. However, there is a technique called renewal pruning that keeps a shrub's size down quite well and maintains its health. It involves removing 20% – 25% of the branches (focusing on the oldest branches) from as close as you reasonably can from the base of the shrub. This will reduce the size by 30% - 50% and leaves plenty of branches to grow leaves to keep the bush's energy levels up. Shrubs that bloom in the spring such as lilac, forsythia and snowball bush should be pruned as soon as they are done blooming. Otherwise, mid-March is a great time to prune all other shrubs if they need it.

There are many types of roses that require slightly different styles of pruning. Prune bush/shrub roses using renewal pruning. Be sure to wear protective clothing and gloves unless you are a glutton for punishment. For hybrid tea and grandiflora roses, prune them down to between knee and waist high depending on their age and vigor. Remove all canes but 3 or 4 of the healthiest as near the base of the rose as possible. Hybrid tea and grandiflora roses bloom repeatedly throughout the growing season. Pruning them back like this keeps their size under control and increases the number of flowers. It also sometimes helps control certain pests and diseases.

Pruning fruit trees is also a challenge. You hear lots of varying advice, and it is hard to know what to do. You are also often stuck with what previous homeowner have done. Because pruning fruit trees is more involved than what can easily be explained on paper, I will just give some general tips. Always start by pruning out dead and diseased wood. After that, look for crossing branches, branches growing up through the main canopy, and branches growing in a downward direction. These are all likely candidates for being removed. As far as how many branches to remove, with the exception of peaches and nectarines, only remove 20% - 25% of the total canopy. This does not include dead and diseased wood. Peaches and nectarines can have up to 40% of their wood removed because fruit is only produced on one-year old wood. USU has several good videos on its YouTube channels concerning pruning fruit trees.

As far as pruning raspberries, you need to know if you have summer bearing or everbearing types. The ever-bearing types can be cut to a few inches above the ground. This allows for a large fall crop but no summer crop. Otherwise, in early spring, remove all of the dead canes from the patch at ground level. They are usually darker colored and have bark that is starting sluff or peel off. Of the remaining living canes, thin out the thinner canes so that the remaining canes are spaced 6 inches apart. After doing this, cut the canes at breast height.