

For gardeners, the winter is a tough time of year due to the weather preventing us from working in our yards. However, I have always found planning for the upcoming year fun. And that can be done now. One way to do so is through plant catalogs and online. I love seeing all the new varieties and figuring out what I want to plant in my yard. Be careful about what you order, though. When you are unfamiliar with a plant species, research online. Whenever I read statements in a plant description about a particular plant thriving anywhere, filling in quickly, or growing rapidly, it gives me pause. It tells me that the particular plant, once planted, will likely be challenging to remove in the future and outgrow its space. Some examples of such plants include Star of Bethlehem, hybrid cottonwoods and willows, Bishop's weed, grape hyacinths, and perennial violets. Another thing to be cautious about is that even though plants listed in catalogs may be cold-hardy in Utah, they may not grow well here due to our dry air and alkaline soil. Sugar maple, red maple, azaleas, rhododendrons, and dogwood trees are some that do not grow well in our soils.

As far as planning goes, many have asked when they can start pruning. It is tempting to prune in the fall, but this can damage trees and shrubs. Additionally, know why you are pruning. Common reasons include removing dead or diseased branches (These can come out at any time.), removing safety hazards, reducing the size of a tree or shrub, and making food-bearing trees and shrubs more productive. Wait for mid-January to prune shade trees, mid-February for apples and pears, and mid-March for stone fruits. Utah State University Extension has many helpful pruning videos on YouTube and pruning fact sheets online for free. If you have questions, review these resources.

When to prune roses is another common question. Start in mid-March. Cut hybrid tea, grandiflora, and floribunda roses to between knee and thigh high, leaving 2 – 4 sturdy canes to regenerate the plant. Shrub roses should be pruned using a technique called renewal pruning. Renewal pruning involves removing 20 - 25% of the branches from the shrub annually as near the base as you can reach, focusing on removing the oldest branches. With this technique, no branches in a shrub will be older than five years old, flowering and fruit-producing bushes will be more productive, and the shrub's size will be reduced by 30 - 50%. However, enough branches remain to grow leaves and keep the bush's energy levels high. Renewal pruning is also recommended for most other bushes and shrubs. You can also prune these in mid-March. The only exceptions are spring-flowering shrubs such as lilac, forsythia, bridal wreath, and snowball bush. These should be pruned as soon as they are done blooming later in the spring.

Finally, with the lack of snow, many have had questions about when to apply pre-emergent to lawns to control crabgrass and if they can do it now. Wait for late March to mid-April. This offers the best timing to control the weed.