

Woody Ornamental Tips - January 2009

Culture

- Trees and shrubs can be pruned now. (publication) However, spring- blooming plants such as azaleas will have reduced blossoms in the spring if pruned now because their flower buds are already set on last year's wood. But if the need to reduce the size of a shrub outweighs the desire for spring bloom, go ahead and prune now. Remove dead, diseased or broken branches and make any other necessary cosmetic cuts. Avoid planting Bradford pear, silver maple, willow and other trees with weak, brittle wood. If you already have these problematic trees, now is a great time to prune out any excessive interior branches and those with narrow angles that are prone to breakage.
- January and February are the two most severe winter months for "winter burning" (marginal leaf scorch) of evergreens. You can protect winter-burn prone such as boxwoods and hollies from winter winds by surrounding them with burlap or cardboard or constructing small, solid windbreaks located 18 inches from the plant on the windward side. Try to prevent snow and ice from building up on gutters and eaves above shrubs. Gently sweep snow loads off of shrubs to prevent breakage.
- Refrain from any hard pruning of vines like clematis until early spring when winter damage can be fully assessed. Consult local nurseries and garden catalogs for appropriate varieties for spring planting.
- Even during winter be careful not to handle the hairy poison ivy vines. The irritating oil, urushiol, will produce rashes and itching throughout the winter. However, this is a good time to sever poison ivy vines at ground level and paint the severed edge with Brush-B-Gon. Be careful not to bring firewood into the house with poison ivy vines attached.

Insect pests

- Remove and destroy bagworm bags (publication) from affected trees- principally on evergreens. The bags contain hundreds of eggs that will hatch out and feed next spring.
- You can also reduce gypsy moth numbers by removing and destroying the tan colored, felt-like, 1 ½ inch long egg masses. They can be found on tree bark, firewood, lawn furniture and other outdoor structures and scraped off wherever found.

- Eastern tent caterpillar (publication) egg masses resemble black styrofoam and are most often located on the ends of wild cherry plum and crabapple trees. Clip them off with pole pruners and throw them in the trash. The fuzzy, tan-colored, capsule-shaped pupal cases you find on wooden structures contain Eastern tent caterpillar pupae.
- Scale insects, like pine needle and hemlock scale, can be controlled anytime that trees are dormant with a dormant oil spray. Spray trees and shrubs that have had aphid, mite or scale problems with dormant oil. Be sure that temperatures are expected to remain above freezing for a 24 hour period after spraying.

Have a pest or gardening question?

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