

March 2009

## Woody Ornamental Landscape Plant Tips

### Culture

- This is the best time to plant, move and re-plant trees and shrubs. It is possible to move small trees now, but avoid digging trees up and re-planting in wet soil; wait until the soil dries out. It is OK to plant trees and shrubs as long as your soil is not saturated with water. Common planting mistakes include planting in compacted or poorly drained soil, planting too deep and buying damaged plants with poor root systems. Avoid planting Bradford pear, silver maple, willow and other trees with weak, brittle wood. They are susceptible to breakage in high winds and to other problems that could require removal in the future. High winds and soft, saturated soils can lead to the tilting of young or newly planted trees. Pull these trees upright and gently tamp the soil down over the root system.
- Staking young trees is no longer recommended.
- If you plan to plant a new crabapple tree or replace an old one, select a scab resistant cultivar.
- Trees and shrubs can be pruned before new growth and when the worst of the winter weather is over. Remove branches broken by winter weather, prune out dead or diseased branches and make any necessary cosmetic cuts. It is not necessary to paint pruning wounds. In fact, wound dressings will impede the natural healing process. You may notice excessive sap bleeding from pruning cuts on elm, maple, birch, dogwood, beech, walnut, magnolia, tulip poplar and redbud. This bleeding is harmless to the tree. Prune out winter burn damage on hollies and other evergreen shrubs. Prune winter damaged canes of non-climbing roses back to healthy wood.
- Heavy pruning of healthy twigs and branches of spring flowering shrubs at this time will reduce the number of blooms. To rejuvenate older, multi-branched shrubs, remove only 1/3 of the oldest wood to prevent removing all flowering/fruited branches at once.
- For a bright vase of color indoors, the prunings of spring flowering shrubs can be brought in and placed in water to force early blooms. Forsythia, pussy willow and some blooming ornamental fruit trees work well for this.
- Shrubby perennials like buddleia (Butterfly bush) that flower on new growth can be cut back to the ground before new growth starts. Roses can be pruned now to maintain shape and control diseases. To determine whether or not a branch is alive, simply scrape the bark with a sharp knife and look for green tissue.
- If you had a problem last year with scale insects spray your trees with a dormant oil prior to bud swell. Spray on a dry day when temperatures are above 40 degrees F. and are expected to remain above freezing for at least 24 hours. The dormant rate can burn green tissue, so if you notice bud or leaf growth, spray horticultural oils at the summer, 2%, rate.
- If you watered your shrubs last year and they still grew poorly, consider fertilizing with a balanced fertilizer. However, this is usually not necessary for shrubs growing in lawns that are fertilized each year.
- Mulch should not be applied until your shrubs leaf out. Mulches should not exceed 2-3 inches in depth.
- Refrain from any hard pruning of vines like clematis until you can determine which vines are alive and which have been winter damaged.
- Do not handle the hairy poison ivy vines wrapped around trees. Be aware that the offending oil of poison ivy, urushiol, is active and can produce symptoms during any time of the year, and continue to be poisonous for up to 2 years after being killed. Be careful not to bring firewood into the house with poison ivy vines attached.

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## **Insects**

- Remove and destroy bagworm bags from affected trees- principally on evergreens. The bags contain hundreds of eggs that will hatch out and feed next spring. Discard or destroy the bags- don't just leave them on the ground.
- Hemlock woolly adelgids are aphid-like sucking pests that appear as white, waxy masses on the needles. Heavy infestations can debilitate trees, particularly when they are stressed. Spray trees with ultra-fine horticultural oil when the crawlers are out in late May or early June. Do not fertilize Hemlocks. Research has shown that increased nitrogen may enhance adelgid populations on hemlock.
- The tiny reddish brown eggs of spruce spider mites can be seen with a hand lens on the twigs and needles of spruce at this time. If you notice signs of this pest, apply a ultra-fine horticultural oil spray which will smother and kill the eggs.
- Inspect trees for gypsy moth egg masses. They are tan colored, felt-like and 1-2 inches long, and may be found on tree bark, firewood or any outdoor, wooden structure.
- Eastern tent caterpillar egg masses resemble black Styrofoam and are usually found on the ends of cherry and crabapple tree branches. Both types of egg masses should be removed and destroyed. The eggs of Eastern tent caterpillar will hatch out when cherry tree leaves unfold. If your trees are heavily infested, you can control them with a spray application of the microbial insecticide, B.t.
- Inspect wintercreeper and Japanese euonymus foliage for scale problems and apply a summer rate of horticultural oil where these insects are a problem.
- Prune out black knot cankers on flowering cherry and plum trees and cedar apple rust galls on cedar trees.

**Have a pest or gardening question?**  
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