



PRUNING TIPS

By Sue McDavid

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Many may think it is not the time of year to be thinking of pruning, but summer pruning has many advantages over dormant-season pruning. If a gardener wishes to keep trees from growing too large, pruning in the summertime will help achieve that goal by devigorating the tree . . . the loss of leaves during the pruning process leads to less photosynthesis and, thus, less growth. The best time to summer-prune is from late May (ideally, it should begin after the new vegetative growth has reached three to four inches in length) to late July or early August, so right now is the best time to do it. For most purposes, summer pruning should be limited to removing the upright and vigorous current season's growth; with only thinning cuts being used (thinning cuts remove an entire shoot back to a side shoot). Thinning cuts do not invigorate a tree or shrub in comparison to some of the other types of pruning cuts.

A good point to remember is that pruning in late winter or early spring (before bud break) actually invigorates a shrub or tree because it causes new tissue to form rapidly. Therefore, if the goal is a smaller tree or shrub, late winter or early spring are not the times to prune. Another point to remember about pruning is that it should be delayed on any spring-blooming shrubs or trees until immediately after flowering; otherwise, you may end up with no bloom at all. That goes for summer-blooming shrubs and trees as well – these should be pruned immediately following flowering.

Late summer or early fall pruning causes vigorous regrowth of tissue, which in some cases may not harden off by the time winter arrives, leading to possible cold damage to the new growth. Therefore, wait until complete dormancy occurs. Remember though that a branch ¼ inch or less in diameter can be pruned out any time of the year, as well as any broken or diseased branches.

Fruit trees especially benefit from summer pruning because most tend to grow too vigorously. Excessively-growing shoots shade lower fruiting branches, leading to fewer fruits. In addition, if trees are appropriately summer-pruned, far less dormant-season pruning is necessary.

For all trees, make sure to prevent sunburn on branches by leaving enough foliage to cover limbs or by painting exposed limbs with a 50/50 mixture of interior white latex paint and water.

These are just a few tips for pruning, but a good reference for more in-depth information on pruning fruit trees is a U.C. Agriculture and Natural Resources book called "The Home Orchard." It is available for purchase at any of our Saturday public education classes or the main office in the Bethell-Delfino Agriculture Building at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville.

Join Master Gardener Julianne Melchor for this Saturday's free public education class: Container Gardening. Do you want to add a splash of color around your front door, or are there times that your perennial beds lack color and bloom? Container gardening is a great way to add new elements of interest and beauty to your garden. The August 10th three-hour class starts at 9:00 a.m. in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Drive, Placerville, CA.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512). Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.edu/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.