



HOME & GARDEN

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Woody Ornamental Tips - December 2008

Culture

- Trees and shrubs can be pruned now. Remove dead or diseased branches and make any necessary cosmetic cuts. Remove broken branches and make pruning cuts back to healthy wood. Extensive pruning of spring flowering plants such as azaleas, rhododendrons, and dogwoods will reduce the amount of blooms in the spring. If you do not desire to reduce flowering, wait until after they bloom next spring to prune them.
- Evergreens such as hollies, boxwoods, and pines can also be moderately pruned this month. The trimmings can be used for Holiday decorating.
- Try to prevent snow and ice from building up on gutters and eaves above shrubs. Heavy snow and ice loads can break branches. Gently sweep snow loads off of shrubs to prevent breakage. Sweep snow and ice off shrubs with an upward motion.
- Mulch should be applied only 2-3 inches deep around ornamental plants and kept away from shrub and tree trunks. Deep mulch makes a favorable habitat for voles. If the mulch is next to woody plant trunks, the voles will feed on and damage bark and wood.
- Trees and shrubs can be fertilized as long as the ground is not frozen. It is rarely necessary to fertilize a mature tree. Newly planted and very young trees benefit the most from tree fertilization.
- Although it is the beginning of winter, newly planted trees and shrubs need water on a regular basis if it is dry. This is especially important for evergreen plants like rhododendrons and azaleas that become "winter-burned" from a combination of frozen soil and a lack of available moisture in the root zone.
- Nursery stock trees and shrubs can be safely planted until the ground freezes. Always carefully examine trees prior to purchase to assess quality. Remove container stock plants to examine root systems. Avoid trees with dead roots or those that are circling the trunk. Avoid problem trees like silver maple, Bradford pear and Norway maple.
- If you buy container grown trees be sure to spread the roots out in the planting hole. With balled and burlap stock cut the twine around the ball and cut away the nylon or burlap wrapping.
- It is too late to transplant trees or shrubs.

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Insect pests

- Hemlocks infested with the woolly adelgid can be sprayed with horticultural oil anytime after trees go dormant and March. Adelgids are aphid-like sucking pests that appear as white, waxy masses. Heavy infestations can debilitate trees, particularly when they are stressed. Deciduous shade trees and evergreen trees that have had scale problems can be sprayed with horticultural oil after leaves drop. NOTE: the temperature must remain above freezing for 24 hours after spraying oil.
- Scale insects, like pine needle and hemlock scale, can be controlled anytime that trees are dormant with a dormant oil spray. Be sure that temperatures are expected to remain above freezing for a 24 hour period after spraying.
- Continue to remove and destroy bagworm bags from trees. The bags contain hundreds of eggs, which will hatch out in the spring. Discard or destroy the bags- don't just leave them on the ground.
- The egg masses of the Eastern tent caterpillar should be pruned out. They resemble black styro-foam and can be seen on the ends of wild cherry and crabapple trees.
- Look for the felt-like, buff colored egg masses of the gypsy moth. They may be found on tree bark, firewood or any outdoor, wooden structure. Remove and destroy these egg masses.

Have a pest or gardening question?
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