



HOME & GARDEN

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Woody Ornamental Plant Tips

- Trees and shrubs can still be pruned now. It is much easier to see what needs to be removed without the leaves on them. Begin by removing branches broken by winter weather, prune out dead or diseased branches and make any necessary cosmetic cuts. 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.
- Refrain from severe pruning of vines like clematis until early spring when winter damage can be fully assessed. To learn more about pruning, refer to our pruning publication HG 84.
- It is possible to transplant small trees and shrubs in February (provided the ground is not frozen very deep).
- Hemlocks infested with the woolly adelgid can be sprayed with dormant oil anytime between now and March 1. To prevent plant damage, the dormant oil directions state that it must not freeze within 24 hours of application. Adelgids are aphid-like sucking pests that appear as white, waxy masses on the needles. Heavy infestations can ruin or kill trees, particularly if they are stressed by drought later this summer.
- Scale insects, like pine needle scale and hemlock scale, can also be controlled with a dormant oil spray anytime that trees and shrubs are dormant. Again, be sure that temperatures are expected to remain above 40 degrees F. for a 24 hour period after spraying.
- 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 dormant 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. They should be removed and destroyed.
- Trees with brittle wood, such as the Bradford pear, are very susceptible to breakage in high winds and/or by the weight of ice. Carefully, remove broken branches and make pruning cuts back to healthy wood. Avoid planting Bradford pear, silver maple, willow and other trees with weak, brittle

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wood because they may develop breakage problems that could damage property or hurt people. Some tree pruning work may be too dangerous for the average homeowner, refer such jobs to professionals.

- February is the month when most ‘winter burn’ (brown needles or leaves) occurs. Winter burn (desiccation) results from a combination of harsh wind, very low temperatures, or bright late winter sun and frozen soil. To reduce damage, consider spraying an anti-desiccant material on vulnerable shrubs (hollies, boxwood, nandina and other broadleaf evergreens). These materials coat the foliage, preventing moisture loss. The coating does wear off, however, and will need to be re-applied one more time before the end of winter. The directions state that anti-desiccants should only be applied when temperatures are above freezing for 24 hours.
- You can also protect sensitive broadleaf evergreen shrubs from damaging winter winds by surrounding them with burlap or cardboard or constructing small, solid windbreaks located 18 inches from the plant on the windward side. Gently sweep snow loads off of shrubs to prevent breakage.
- Remove bagworm bags from evergreen shrubs. These 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.
- Look at the base of shrubs, especially mugo pine, nandina, azalea, boxwood and junipers, for signs of voles feeding on the bark. Voles are a type of field mouse that take cover in deep mulch and feed on roots, crowns and above ground wood. If you have a problem with voles remove the mulch layer and set some snap traps baited with apples or peanut butter.
- 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. Be very careful not to bring firewood into the house with poison ivy vines attached.

Have a pest or gardening question?
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