

Tools for successful pruning



What are the most important considerations for a successful pruning job? Whether one is trying to rejuvenate a shrub in the front yard, or maximize fruit production in the mini-orchard, there are a few essentials.

The best tools are the ones best suited for the task. There are many choices when it comes to implements for pruning, but not all are correct for all jobs.

Something as straightforward as a saw can be a great benefit or a headache. Obviously a hacksaw or keyhole saw would be a terrible option. Even though a tree or bush is composed of wood, a common handsaw will not work. More correctly, it might work, but will benefit

neither the plant nor the tool. Pruning

saws usually have six teeth per inch and are used when a branch is more than one half inch thick. There are several types of handles, from a simple one to a pistol grip. They may fold or not, but it is critical to tighten a folding one so it remains open when in use. The best folding saw is one that locks open or closed.

Electric or gas pruning saws can be useful for big tasks.

Pruners can have short or long handles, which are useful for extending reach or getting close up. There are very long handled tools that can saw or prune up to ten or more feet high. Certain hand tools have ratchet handles that enable one to get through tough wood with less effort, but the most important feature is the type of cutting surface. A bypass pruner cuts in a scissor fashion, with two sharp edges that do not crush delicate plant material. If that is not a concern, when cutting dead tissue for instance, an anvil pruner is a good investment. This has one sharp blade that cuts against a flat surface, much like a knife on a



cutting board.

Ergonomically designed saws and pruners make life much easier, but even terrific design cannot replace safety. All implements should be maintained – sharp and clean. A sharp blade is safer than a dull one, whether chopping vegetables or pruning shrubbery. Cleanliness extends the life of the tool, and is especially critical when dealing with a plant that might be infested with insects or infected with a disease. If there is a chance of disease infection, clean the tool between each cut with disinfectant (either alcohol or a commercial product such as Lysol™).

Safety also includes personal protection. Goggles guard eyes from flying chips and gloves can protect hands from blisters or thorns. An up-to-date tetanus shot is good idea whenever working with sharp objects. If using an electric or gas tool, remember they are noisy, so earplugs are a must.

Successful pruning is done at the right time. A tree that goes dormant in winter should have any heavy pruning done around this time, which is also true for shrubs that bloom in late summer.

There are many books and websites with pruning instructions, but for additional guidance call the Master Gardener help line at 702-257-5555 or email lvmastergardeners@unce.unr.edu.

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