



Pruning in Moapa

Even though we have been grooming landscapes since human kind first started deliberately putting plants in the ground, pruning is still something controversial. With the coming of winter, leaves have turned color and they have begun to drop. This is the important time to look closely at the woody branches of trees, shrubs and roses.

Individual taste can be the determining factor in pruning, although what we have learned to appreciate might not be in the best interests of the plant. One of the most unfortunate of practices that we should eliminate is the misguided habit of shaving shrubs into balls and squares. The result is a thin layer of live growth at the tips of the branches. This appears “tidier” to some people, but what happens to the plant is the loss of many flower buds and part of its root producing capacity. Look beyond the shell of green or flowers, and the branches are virtually bare, dead wood.

Shrubs are not the only plants that undergo gardeners’ insults – ornamental grasses are frequently sheared into what look like little bales of straw. If someone wants a bale of straw or hay in the yard, it would be simpler to purchase one at the feed store. Perhaps there is a fear that cutting the ornamental grass too low would prevent it from growing come spring. No fear – just like the grass in a lawn, ornamental grass develops from growing points beneath the ground. That is why it is possible to mow turf grass to a very short height, and it still returns.

Even worse than these examples is pruning desert natives. Occasionally, an agave will outgrow its space – often when it was installed too close to a sidewalk – and someone hacks its leaves back. What is left is dreadful. The plant cannot replace those leaves, and the resulting plant is lopsided and unsightly.



Pruning workshop January 2014

With any plant that will need to fit in a limited space, the best bet is to plan for its size at maturity.

All of this is not to say that nothing should receive pruning. Plants can respond well, as long as the pruning does not turn into plant abuse.

For the health of the plant, one should not hesitate to prune branches that are dead, diseased or broken. When two limbs are rubbing against each other, one of them should come out; otherwise, the rubbing can open a wound that is an avenue for plant diseases.

We grow plants for many different reasons; aesthetics, certainly, but also for shade, fruit, privacy, even ground cover. Each of these has different pruning requirements. A shade tree is

generally pruned for shape and to remove badly growing branches, while pruning a fruit tree is done in order to increase yield.

Much material is available on the internet for those who want to groom their landscape plants properly. Unfortunately, not all the information is correct. I will be teaching a pruning class in January at the Cooperative Extension office. Call the Master Gardener Help line at 702-257-5555 for more information.

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