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THIS ISSUE:

*Winter Time is the Best Time to Prune Deciduous Trees, Shrubs & Roses:*

- 1. Pruning Simplified*
- 2. Roses \* Roses \* Roses*
- 3. What About Perennials*
- 4. Healthy Pruning Habits*

January and February are really good months to prune. Try to perform all your heavy pruning before the new buds flower or leaf out. Take a look at your trees and shrubs without their leaves. Study the overall shape, size, balance and health of your plants. This is your opportunity to be a steward of your plants and assist them in achieving optimal health by taking some corrective measures by appropriately pruning. Don't be afraid of hurting the plants. Trust in your common sense. Here are few practical steps to pruning.

1. PRUNING SIMPLIFIED. The most basic pruning task is removing a branch that is crossing or rubbing another branch. *First* identify a branch that seems like it is out of place or is growing into another branch. Select the best branch to keep which leaves the other branch to remove. Use a sharp long handled lopper or hand held pruning shear. Make your cuts close in to where the branch begins and cut it cleanly. The *rule of thumb* is you should not be able to hang your hat on the fresh cut. Flowering trees (Crape Myrtle, Redbud, Flowering Pear, fruit trees (most), dormant shrubs like the Hibiscus Rose of Sharon and Flowering Quince all would appreciate a little help from their friendly gardener to remove unwanted branches. Note: *fruit trees* require special study before pruning heavily so that you understand where the fruiting wood is located for different types of fruit trees. You don't want to accidentally prune off all the fruit spurs and negate your future harvest.
2. ROSES \* ROSES \* ROSES. Yes, there are at least *3 different types of Roses* that you may prune. First, don't bother pruning *miniature Roses* unless they need shaping or restraining from a walkway. *Climbing roses* are the most difficult to prune because they are intertwined into trellises and structures and require much careful surgery to remove. Typically, the structure of climbing roses should be

- left in tact and pruning should be concentrated on the most recent growth from last year. *Prune last years long canes back by as much as 75%* and secure them with ties to the trellis. Save the most vigorous canes but remove the thinner diameter or weaker ones. *Always remove suckers* that grow near the base of the trunk and usually look extra thorny or different in color. Now to the most common roses: *Hybrid Tea Roses*. Typical tea roses will grow as shrubs from 3 to 6 feet high and can be pruned with this easy *rule of thumb*: leave the best 3 to 5 canes and prune away the rest. Save the most vigorous canes that appear thicker in diameter than the rest. Always prune to an outside bud so you can direct the new growth away from the center. *Make your cuts at an angle (i.e. 45%) about \_ of an inch above the new bud*. New buds usually can be identified by a ring around the cane revealing a new hidden or emerging bud. Cut the canes heavy at about 12 inches above the ground. You may need to be more generous and leave longer canes on old roses. Again, prune away sucker canes that may be popping out below the graph and usually are located very close to the ground or main trunk. Be sure to use heavy leather gloves to avoid those sharp thorns.
3. PERENNIALS. *Hold on to your pruning sheers until approximately the 2<sup>nd</sup> week in March* or past the heaviest frost period. Then when you prune in March the new growth won't be damaged by frost. Remove the dead wood and tops back to the living wood. The best way to tell where the line is between old dead wood and healthy living wood is to begin making modest cuts part way down the branch and look for a green ring around the inside of the bark. *If it's green it's alive* and if it's all brown then it is old dead wood. Thin and reduce the length of branches based on shape and strength of the branch. You can always pinch new growth back to force lateral branching during the spring and summer.
  4. HEALTHY PRUNING HABITS. It is recommended that you *sharpen and clean* your pruning tools before you begin. Sharpen your tools like you would a kitchen knife. They should be able to slice a piece of paper and also your finger (so be very careful). If you want to be really prudent use rubbing alcohol and a rag so you can wipe clean the pruning blades between pruning different plants so you don't transmit diseases between them. It is also helpful but not required to paint the fresh cuts with a touch of interior latex white paint to prevent pests from sneaking into the wound of the tree. White is not a good place for insects to hide their eggs. *Clean up all your cuttings* and either compost or dispose of them so they don't attract disease and insects which then spread to your healthy trees and shrubs.

***Congratulations:*** You have just taken the first step as a good steward of your garden and provided some TLC in the form of pruning your plants. Their health and your enjoyment will be increased because you had the courage to prune!