

## Evergreens

Evergreen plants can be divided into two broad categories: (a) narrow leaf (needled) evergreens such as pines, junipers, yews and (b) broadleaf evergreens like rhododendrons, hollies, and box.

Limit the pruning of most evergreens to the removal of dead, diseased, and injured wood, and the maintenance of the natural shape of plants.

Dead, diseased, and broken wood can be removed at any time of year. However, for general pruning the best time is in late winter or early spring just before growth begins. Narrow leaf evergreens may be pruned a second time in June before the new growth has matured. It may be necessary to give particularly fast-growing plants an additional light pruning or two during the growing season.

### Specific Plants:

**Pines:** Prune preferably in early spring. Make cuts just above needle whorls. Additional pruning may be done before new growth hardens in June. Pines normally require little pruning.

**Spruce and fir:** Cuts may be made at any point along the younger portions of the branches. The best time to prune these plants is in the early spring. This pruning can be made if it is necessary to maintain the natural shape of the plants.

**Juniper, chamaecyparis and arborvitae:** This group consists of many tree, shrub and prostrate forms. These species can withstand relatively heavy pruning and many may be trained into various forms by shearing. Early spring pruning is best, but additional light pruning later in the season may be necessary.

**Yew and hemlock:** It is preferable to allow these plants to retain their natural form, but both respond well to heavy pruning and shearing. Yews are able to withstand exceptionally severe pruning into the older wood. Early spring is the best time for pruning, but occasional light pruning later in the season may be necessary.

**Rhododendron, azalea, pieris and mountain laurel:** These plants generally require very little pruning, as they are slow-growing. Old flower clusters should be removed immediately after flowering. Prune out any dead, diseased, weak or wayward branches.

**Box, evergreen privet, barberry and pyracantha:** With the exception of box, these species grow rather rapidly. All these plants will stand heavy pruning. Early spring is a good time to prune them. Because they are generally quite vigorous, additional trimming during the growing season may be advisable.

**Hollies:** These plants include both tree and shrub forms. American holly may be pruned in December for Christmas greens. Chinese holly is also a source of attractive greens and may be trimmed in the early spring. When pruning American holly, always make the cut at a node, just above a lateral bud. Prune so as to maintain the natural shape of the tree. The shrubby Chinese and Japanese hollies can be more severely pruned and may require some additional light pruning during the growing season.

**Mahonia and leucothoe:** These are rather slow-growing, and require little annual pruning, but if necessary, do it immediately after these plants flower in the spring.

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This column is written by Washington State University/Skagit County certified Master Gardeners. Questions may be submitted to WSU/Skagit County Cooperative Extension, 306 S. First, Mount Vernon, WA 98273-3805.

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