

PRUNING EVERGREENS

Evergreens hold their leaves year-round. They have interesting shapes, colors, and textures; unusual cones and colorful berries. One of their greatest assets is the ability to screen a foundation, garage, wall, unwelcome view or viewers. They are good windbreaks - blocking the cold wind and snow.



Needled evergreens include pine, spruce, fir and hemlock. They have woody cones.



Narrow leaf evergreens include juniper, arborvitae and yew. They have flat needlelike leaves or scales and fleshy cones that look like berries.

Evergreen trees and shrubs are the healthiest and look best when they are allowed to grow to their natural size and shape or form. If a plant is too large for the site it will require a lot of time and energy to maintain. Most evergreens don't need regular pruning and many need no pruning at all. *Select trees and shrubs that fit the site and purpose, whether specimen, hedge, screen, etc.*

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Growth Patterns

Needled evergreens start growth each spring from buds formed during the previous year. They have **one** major flush of growth each spring. After this early growth matures in mid-summer, the plants develop new terminal buds that remain dormant until the next year. Their characteristic whorled branching results from growth from the buds at the ends of every branch and at the top of the central leader.

Most *narrow leaf evergreens* grow in spurts during spring and summer. Their new growth also comes from buds formed the previous year. They have a random branching pattern and grow periodically all over the plant during spring and summer.

Evergreens, unlike many deciduous plants, branch from the ground up to the top. Maintaining these lower branches may be important to plants such as arborvitae, firs and spruce because without them the plants will look odd and top heavy. Pines, on the other hand, often are very pleasing without lower limbs.

Visit our website at <https://extension.wsu.edu/spokane/master-gardener-program/home-lawn-and-garden/>
e-mail your garden questions to: mastergardener@spokanecounty.org

Extension programs and employment are available to all without discrimination. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.

Buds

Terminal buds are usually fat, brown and are found at the ends of twigs beginning in mid-summer. There are many other buds found further back on branches. Some may form side branches while others remain latent. Pruning can stimulate latent buds, causing more branching and a bushier appearance.

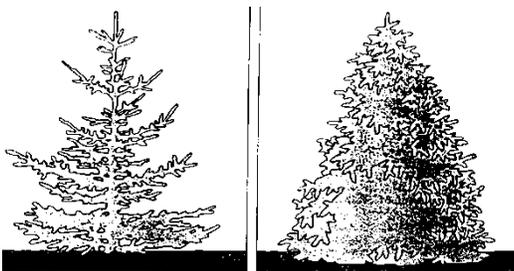
PRUNING TERMS AND TECHNIQUES

Thinning Cuts -- Removing whole branches or cutting back to a large one. Thinning cuts do not stimulate excessive growth. Trees and shrubs look more natural. The plant is opened up to sunlight and air.



Heading Cuts -- Cutting to a stub, to a small lateral or to a bud. Vigorous new growth is stimulated near the cuts.

Training a New Leader -- If a leader is broken or unintentionally pruned, a lateral branch can be trained to become a new leader. Training should begin in spring when branches are flexible and can be bent without breaking. A splint (see illustration) is used to hold the new leader in place. **Leave splint in place throughout the growing season.** Use a soft fabric such as a nylon stocking to tie splint. **Don't use wire or twine.**



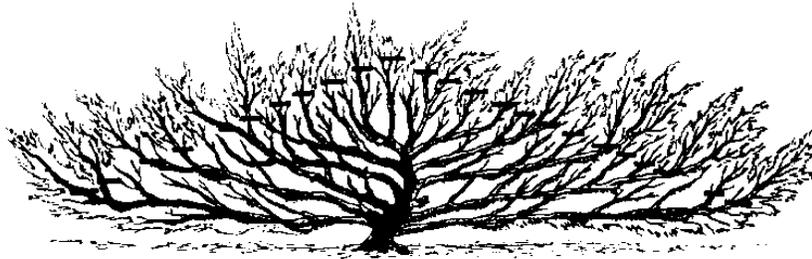
Shearing - Cutting off the soft, new growth. Shearing is used to control growth and shape. Sheared shrubs and trees grow slightly larger each year. Shearing is labor intensive since it must be done on a regular basis. Also, sheared plants tend to develop a thin covering or foliage surrounding a bare center.

The tree on the left has been allowed to grow naturally, while the tree on the right has been sheared each year.

Candles - New growth on pines, firs and spruces. A candle consists of a flexible stem and a developing bundle of needles. Size of plant can be controlled by cutting back candles at different times and lengths or by removing entirely.



Shingle-Cutting - Used to maintain shape of spreading shrubs such as junipers. Use thinning cuts to keep upper branches short.



SPECIFIC PRUNING RECOMMENDATIONS

Junipers - To limit size, thin new growth almost to the point of origin. Make the cuts just above side shoots that are going in the desired direction. Thin the top branches to prevent shading of lower branches and to provide a layered look.

Rejuvenate junipers by cutting out entire branches and cutting others back to where they branch.

When: Prune late dormant through early spring, February - April. Light pruning can be done anytime.

Yews - Yews have growth spurts in spring and in summer. If a formal look is desired, such as a hedge or topiary, yews should be sheared twice a year. A disadvantage to shearing is that a thin foliage shell can develop around a bare interior. For an informal hedge or specimen, use thinning cuts once a year before new growth begins in spring.

To rejuvenate a yew, cut to within 6 to 12 inches of the ground in early spring.

When: Late dormant to early spring, February-April, for major pruning. Light pruning can be done anytime.

Arborvitae and Cedar - If grown naturally, little pruning is needed. To attain a desired height for hedges or screens, allow plants to grow 6 inches to one foot taller than desired height. Then cut back to about 6 inches below desired height. Allow plant to grow to desired height. This provides a strong attractive surface that can be maintained with yearly trimming.

Keep in mind that arborvitae and cedar don't re-sprout from bare wood.

When: Late dormant to shape, February and March. Touch ups after spring growth into early summer.

C111 – Pruning Evergreens

Spruce - Other than removing occasional dead branches, spruces require almost no pruning. To create denser growth, cut new growth back about halfway. Try to maintain lower branches. Avoid topping since it will result in a multiple-leader tree. If the central leader is lost or must be removed, train a new one.

When: Prune late dormant to early spring, February to April.

Pines - Usually need little or no pruning. Remove dead wood. Never leave a stub. Pinch candles to stimulate more compact growth. If you want to limit growth, wait until candles are 2 to 4 inches long and then pinch 1/4 to 1/2 off. For no growth, let candles grow to 1 inch and then remove. Avoid topping since it will result in an unnatural multiple-leader tree.

When: In spring after candles elongate, but before needles expand. Remove dead wood anytime.

Firs - Usually need little or no pruning. Remove dead and broken branches. Don't cut back to leafless wood or the entire branch may die. Avoid topping since it will result in a multiple leader. If more than one leader forms, remove weaker ones. Leave lower branches if possible. Limit growth and make denser by trimming candles back about half way.

When: Late dormant into spring, February-April.

Hemlock - Need little or no pruning. Hemlocks tolerate shearing - can be used as hedge or windbreak. Will also tolerate heavy thinning.