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Mark Keaton's Extension News: Now is the time for shade-tree pruning

While most pruning can be done any time of the year, pruning shade trees is a job usually reserved for the winter months (dormant season).

Shade-tree pruning should be limited to shaping and removing dead, diseased or damaged limbs.

Dehorning — the practice of cutting large limbs back to within a few inches of the trunk — should be done only in cases of severe injury by wind, ice or storm.

Remove only those limbs that interfere with the natural shape of a tree. Dehorning won't help shape a tree because a tree tends to assume the shape of its particular species anyway.

Dehorning can lead to insect and disease problems and severe dehorning can kill a tree.

Blooming trees present some special problems. Most won't bloom if they're pruned at the wrong time of the year. Dogwoods and redbuds should be pruned immediately after flowering, if it's necessary to prune at all.

Pruning now will not hurt them; it only will remove the flowerbuds.

Shrubs grown mainly for their flowers such as azaleas, forsythia, weigela, flowering quince and spring-blooming spireas should be pruned after they bloom. They set their buds in late summer and fall, and pruning before spring removes flowering wood.

Crepe myrtles bloom on current growth. This means they flower only on new wood. The more new wood, the more flowers. Pruning should be done just before new growth begins in the spring (late February-early March). Remove one-third to one-half of the last year's growth.

Pruning is more than just cutting off limbs.

A mistake can cost you a valuable landscape plant.

If you're not sure how to prune a specific plant, stop by the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension office and pick up the "Pruning Ornamental Plants" publication or call 425-2335.

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