

Features

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Timberrrr! Pruning Tips for Late Fall

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Timber can be a blessing or a curse, depending on the circumstances. With the last of the leaves falling to the ground, a small window of opportunity exists for tree pruning. However, we often don't think about it until it's too late.

Many homeowners heavily prune their trees at improper times during the growing season. If you read through the Old Farmer's Almanac, you'll find suitable dates for suggested tree pruning. No kidding!

Late fall and early winter are ideal times to trim away branches and limbs that might be weak or diseased before they break from the season's wind, ice and snow load. With leaves out of the way, damaged or diseased branches become more clearly visible. Since trees aren't actively growing at this time, it's safe to prune without causing harm.

Make sure your shelves are stocked with a couple of products to protect fresh tree cuts. Pruning paint or pruning sealer aerosol, applied to fresh cuts, can help protect a tree against disease issues. Some gardeners prefer to wrap damaged trunk bark as another measure to prevent future sunscald or insect damage. In areas with abundant rabbits and deer, protecting the bark of young trees is as easy as installing a plastic tree trunk protector.

This is also a good time to check stakes and guidewires to ensure newly planted trees are protected from harsh winter winds that may topple your evergreen or deciduous tree. Advise your customers to take time to inspect the wire or rope around their tree trunks. If it's not secure or tight enough, it may girdle or cut into the bark, causing severe damage when spring returns. Cut up pieces of garden hose, usually 6 to 10 in. in length, make great and inexpensive sleeves around the wire or rope to help protect against rubbing.

Specific tree species may have additional needs to tend prior to the onset of winter. Tree roses, for example, are vulnerable to extreme winds and temperature swings. Many rosarians recommend installing four wooden stakes as a surround to attach a burlap wrap around the plant after an application of Wilt Pruf or Bonide Wilt Stop. These products are anti-dessicants that help keep plant canes and bud unions from drying out.

Another tree rose winter protection method is called "heeling." If the tree rose is planted in the garden, you may choose to cut around the ball of the roots about half way around. Once this is performed, you may tilt and lay the entire tree rose stock on its side and carefully secure it to the ground. Cover the plant with mulch or straw and place a burlap cover over the top of your entire plant. Use ground staples to keep the burlap in place from winter winds.

Last, but not least, urge your customers to keep an active eye out for heavy snow or ice on their tree branches during the winter. Some trees, like the densely branched Japanese maple, are very susceptible to breaking under the weight of wet snow. This can be prevented by brushing away snow from the branches soon after a new snowfall. Don't delay this important garden chore or you might hear your trees whisper in the winter night: snap,

crackle, pop... and timber! **GP**

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