

Pruning with a Mission

Written by Laura Lee Rose

Wednesday, 25 March 2015 10:15 - Last Updated Wednesday, 25 March 2015 10:21



Whether it's an overgrown shrub, hedge, tree or trellis you should have a goal in mind when you prune. Unfortunately many shrubs and trees were improperly planted in the landscape. Foundation plants may be too close to the building and too close to each other. Trees may have been installed as specimens but over time began to crowd or shade other plantings.

These problems could have been avoided by good landscape and site planning. By considering the mature size and form of a plant and spacing them appropriately from the building or other plantings, there will be less maintenance required in pruning. For example, many ornamentals which are used as foundation plants can get 8-15 feet tall. Why were they planted under 6 foot windows, 2 feet from the foundation and 3 feet apart? A live oak or red maple that can grow 60 feet tall probably wasn't a good choice in the front yard of a house on a small lot that also has centipede lawn. There are other small trees that will give seasonal interest and match the scale of the house and property.

Having clean sharp tools is paramount in proper pruning. So is having the skill to perform surgery. There are a couple of goals to consider. 1. Try to maintain the natural form of the plant. 2. Open up the canopy to allow airflow and light inside. 3. Prune healthy trees and shrubs first and then address any disease or insect problems. 4. Time pruning with plant growth. Natural form can be upright, spreading or rounded and should have been the first consideration in plant selection. Improving air circulation may discourage diseases and insects; leaves need sunlight to photosynthesize and make food for the plant. It is always correct to prune damaged or diseased wood but it is best to prune in late winter before spring flush or in some cases just after flowering. Landscaping should improve the value of your property. Buy the best tools that

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you can and keep them clean and sharp. My favorite tools for pruning are bypass hand pruners, folding pruning saw, extendable arm loppers, and a spray bottle of rubbing alcohol to wipe them down after and before use. For more information on proper pruning please check out the Clemson University Home and Garden Information Center fact sheets.

<http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/landscape/shrubs/hgic1053.html>

<http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/plants/landscape/trees/hgic1003.html>