



The Time to Prune is Now

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Perhaps the weather has settled for a while. Alternating cold and hot spells are not good for our plants. When temperatures go up, our plants tend to think we are further into spring than we truly are and they will begin to grow and bloom.

The unseasonable warmth means that many have begun working in their yards, and the question comes up, how do I manage my landscape, when do I prune? Typically, given a range, it is recommended to prune January to early March. However, the answer is, well it depends!

When do I prune my fruit trees? Generally, you prune peaches, apples and pears between December and February. Therefore, in an ideal year, you may have already pruned them. Many fruit trees are already beginning to bloom. However, it is still possible to prune them, but prune them as soon as possible. Pruning later in the dormant season is better in some seasons since trees are more susceptible to damage in the case of a late freeze. When looking at a muscadine vine, the fruit grows on new growth shoots. With that, you should prune canes back leaving about 3 inches of growth from the spurs. If you are growing blueberries, lucky you, after establishment, rabbiteye blueberries require little pruning until they reach about 4 to 6 feet. For newly planted blueberries, we typically recommend pruning the shrub back to 1/3 size of the plant and remove the first year's bloom in order to allow the energy of the plant to go towards growth instead of fruit production.

What about my ornamental trees and shrubs? Spring-flowering plants can be pruned anytime after they bloom through mid-July. The bud for next year's growth is already in position before the dormant season, so by pruning in winter months, you are removing that year's bloom. Summer-flowering plants should generally be pruned between January and early-March. However, as we said before, it depends. Pruning during the dormant season inhibits new growth; therefore, if we do catch a late freeze, those plants are more susceptible to damage.

Can I still trim my ornamental grasses? If you pull the leaves apart and look into the center of the plant, you may or may not see new growth. If the new leaves have already started to grow, wait until next year. If not, it is still possible to trim the grasses.

Of course, with any of these, it is important to remove any disease or damaged growth in order to maintain your plants health and longevity.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact the Burke County Extension Office at (706) 554-2119.