

# The Augusta Chronicle

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## Campbell Vaughn: When is the best time to prune your plants? Find out here.

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Published 3:45 a.m. ET Oct. 20, 2023 | Updated 3:45 a.m. ET Oct. 20, 2023

One of the more consistent questions I get is: “Can I prune this tree, shrub, bush, flower, etc., now?” In other words, I don’t really like the way it is looking or I know this plant needs pruning sometime, so I am considering getting out in the yard and making something happen.

Well, I am here to help. There are some easy steps to follow. A good rule to follow is prune a plant after it blooms. The reasoning is fairly simple. Once a plant blooms, it will rest a little while and then start forming buds for the following year’s bloom.

The perfect example is the ubiquitous azalea. Most of these heavy spring bloomers flower around Masters time and then start setting buds to bloom for the next spring in July. That gives us a good three-month window to get to whacking. And when I say whacking, I mean good clean cuts with sharp pruning tools.

Another good rule to follow is to not prune non-flowering evergreens like boxwoods, cleyera, ligustrum, pittosporum and podocarpus heavily in the late fall and early winter. Most plants respond to pruning by flushing out with new tender leaves if the climate is right. Our weather can be warm when it isn’t supposed to be and that can mean new tender growth can sprout just in time for a hard cold spell.

The tender leaves don’t usually handle the cold well and the new plant growth can get freeze burn. My recommendation is to wait until February or early March to trim back these evergreens. February and March is generally a good time to heavy prune hollies because they usually berry in the fall and winter.

A specific plant that I get asked about pruning this time of year are hydrangeas. Hydrangea macrophylla (Mophead) is avgroup of hydrangeas that include repeat bloomers. These shrubs bloom on both the old wood from the previous year and on current season’s wood.

The best time to trim these is in August. If you are a little late and wait until Oct. 1, you maybe OK. By winter, you are too late.

The ever popular *Hydrangea paniculata* 'Lime Light' blooms a little later in the summer on this year's growth. So pruning in the spring is just fine.

Oakleaf Hydrangeas really aren't meant to be pruned, but if you have to trim them, lightly cut them after they bloom in early summer.

If you feel uncertain about which variety you have, a safe rule for all types of hydrangeas is that no pruning is better than the wrong type of pruning, so just deadhead the spent flowers.

**Campbell Vaughn:** Just in time for Halloween, an immigrant spider has made its way to Augusta

A few other popular ornamentals that may need attention in the landscape are leggy plants like forsythia and nandina. Forsythia doesn't have a base trunk, but grows as a bunch of individual canes. Trim one-third of the cane back at the soil line yearly. It is best to take the older canes out over the younger ones.

Old fashion nandina can spread over of an area in time and become tall and leggy. This plant doesn't grow from a single base so the best way to get fuller nandina is to stair step the cuts. Cut one at 12 inches, one at 18 inches and one at 24 inches until you have a desired massing. Waiting to prune nandina until after they berry through the winter and spring is best.

These pruning tips are general recommendations and not rules. If you have a specific question about pruning a plant, let us know and we will be glad to help.