



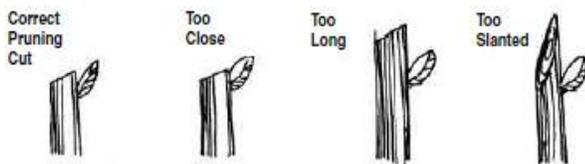
Horticulture Notes: Pruning Winter's Damage

Sandra Lawson

After a bruising winter of incessant snow, Arctic blasts of sub-zero temperatures, and cascading waterfalls of icicles, much damage to our gardens and foundation plantings has been sustained. Oh, where to begin?

Let's start with perimeter plantings around the house foundation. Shrubs and trees with broken branches need to be pruned as soon as you can reach them. Mounds of snow may continue to hold you back, especially on the north side of the home so pruning may have to wait. When you can, remove damaged branches just below the wound and/or fracture. Do this to all trees and shrubs before you begin to shape any of them. After removing the damaged plant material, step backwards to examine what remains. You might consider whether both sides of the foundation plantings still appear in relative proportion to each other? Can you see what shaping is needed to restore balance? Are you up for the task? Perhaps it is more appropriate to remove certain trees and shrubs rather than try to re-hab them. You get to make this decision.

When you do the shaping, make your cuts $\frac{1}{4}$ " above a lateral leaf or branch bud. Lateral means on the side; so the leaf or branch will grow away from the trunk, exposing it to more sun and air circulation. The cut should be on an angle.



Let's assume you have rhododendrons and azaleas both to the right and left of the front door. Perhaps one side sustained more damage than the other. Shape this damaged side first after all pruning of injured material has been removed. Begin by thinning and shortening the remaining branches as little as possible until you regain the desired shape. Make sure your tools are sharp so less damage to the plant occurs. Remember all of this amputation causes stress. So to prune and shape in late winter is best because the plant is still dormant [ergo, less stressed] and will gain a burst of energy in the spring because excess and damaged branches have been removed. Shape the shrubs and trees on the other side of the front door; thin and shorten them to match the other side. If you think all this thinning and shaping will throw off the proportions in the rest of your landscape, don't thin and shape yet. Step back to examine your plantings to decide what changes in height and girth would be most pleasing to your eye and the least laborious.

Most foundation gardens are layered with the shortest shrubs in the front, medium height shrubs in the middle, and tallest shrubs in the row closest to the house. This layering conceals the foundation, provides interest [varying heights] to the eye, and allows for more bark and leaf texture, flower and leaf color, and variety in species. So, damage to the shrubs closest to the foundation may significantly reduce the height of the front-most rows. How awkward!



Looking at the tallest row, you could completely remove the damaged shrub and replace it with the same species that matches its partner on the other side in height and girth. Or you could prune some or all of the plantings in that row to better complement your arrangement. Or some shrubs could remain the same, unpruned, skipping every other or every third plant so height flows up and down gradually. Perhaps the differences in height between the middle and last [tallest] rows would allow you to forgo further shaping. If not, shape as needed the front rows.

Where you have to trim the girth for shaping, spaces may develop which could temporarily be filled with tall annuals. Since these plants complete their life cycle in one year, the pruned plant has time to fill out again. If unsightly space persists into the next year, add annuals to fill it. Eventually, the shrub will re-fill its space.

If these damaged shrubs are flower bearing, shaping could remove the buds that form on last year's branches [old wood]. To save half the buds, prune every 2-3 branch to the new height. After flowering, prune the remaining branches so the shrub is the same height all around. You will end up with half the blooms this year but you will have color.

When pruning trees, always remove branches that grow to the inside of the plant; they cannot reach adequate light and become stressed, winding around other branches as they try to grow up and out. Stressed plants succumb more readily to pests, drought or moisture extremes, and other unusual environmental conditions. Remove branches that rub against another branch; rubs cause friction bruises and delicious entries for diseases and vermin. Prune to keep the canopy open and airy. If a tree has a trunk that divides into a "Y", prune the side of the "Y" that grows less upright. Unpruned, this "Y" is the most likely place for a tree to crack and break. Pruning, before the chance for damage occurs, makes the division a healthy cut rather than a tearing, ripping rupture.