

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 1-25-05) Pruning Time © 2006

I recently had the pleasure of hosting a pruning workshop at my garden with Bess Bronstein, the doyenne of pruning and horticulture instructor at Edmonds Community College, as our instructor. Mark your calendars now for a pruning class instructed by Bronstein at Nils Sundquist Nursery (Sawdust Hill Road) on Saturday February 11. Call Poulsbo Parks and Recreation at 779-9898 to register. The class is a very affordable \$10. Bronstein is a member of the Poulsbo Tree Board, the sponsor of the class.

In the meantime this week let's talk about pruning ornamental woody plants and next week let's learn about pruning fruit bearing plants and trees. Also catch Bronstein at the Northwest Flower and Garden Show on Thursday February 9, lecturing on "Great Woody Trees and Shrubs for Small Gardens" at 4:45 p.m.

Bronstein's theory of pruning is "know your plants and how they grow." She also said, "don't read the pruning books." She was kidding somewhat. Pruning books can be a guide but classes and hands-on learning is the best way to learn pruning. Each plant is different, pruning is not a one size fits all situation. Gardeners need to examine their own lives and lifestyle and then select plants accordingly.

Most woody plants can be grouped generally into three categories: cane growers, mounders and plants that want to be trees. When pruning or deciding whether to prune or not, you'll first examine how the plant grows. Some plants love to be pruned and shaped. If you love pruning choose those plants. If you find pruning a chore, select plants requiring little or no pruning. If you're a timid pruner or can't attend classes and books seem too technical for you, consult with your favorite nursery person. Kitsap County also abounds with garden consultants and coaches who will come to your home to give you tips and provide hands-on pruning instruction. WSNLA (Washington State Nursery and Landscape Association) at www.wslnla.org lists consultants in our area. Local nurseries also maintain resource lists.

You'll find books that say remove a third of the woody cane growing plants every few years. You'll also read about the three D's of pruning (removing dead, diseased and dumb). Bess taught us that these techniques are often cited but common sense is an even better indicator of whether to prune or not. Learn to read your plants. In our climate we need to wait until early March to prune roses and summer blooming hydrangeas. This way the tender new growth won't be harmed by frosts. With trees and bushes that send up suckers and water sprouts, wait until mid-summer before pruning out this growth. A favorite native landscaping tree, amalanichier, wants to revert back to a shrub so it sends up lots of suckers. Remember to remove these every year and your tree will be healthier and happier.

Mounders require little pruning and, when they do need pruning, can be sheared back into their rounded mounding shapes. Cane growers are forgiving if we take out too much vegetation. An example of a tree-wanna-be is a rhododendron. You would only prune out dead wood or portions that are what you consider unruly or growing weirdly.

While you're waiting for part two of pruning tips, visit www.plantamnesty.org for abundant pruning information or find the book "Cass Turnbull's Guide to Pruning" ISBN 1570613168 (Sasquatch) at your favorite bookstore or Kitsap Regional Library branches.

Contact Peg in care of this newspaper or email ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us or gardenmentor@yahoo.com