

Healthy Home and Garden Tips

Winter Pruning

One of the best times to prune is in late winter when trees are dormant and before new leaf buds and flowers form. Most fruit trees in particular, benefit from a good winter trim. Regular pruning of plants promotes healthy growth and encourages flowering without the need for harmful sprays, but much like a good haircut, pruning is an art form. I speak from personal experience when I say anyone can cut a tree but not everyone can do it well. Not too long ago putting a pair of clippers in my hand was a sure-fire recipe for hilarious disaster. My family used to marvel over my pruning failures. Fortunately, none of the mistakes caused serious or permanent damage to my trees and shrubs. Although there is a science behind good pruning, learning the proper techniques is easy. Improve your skills by following these simple tips for plants that look their best year after year.



Pruning Basics

- Use sharp, clean pruning tools to prevent disease and damage to the plant.
- Choose the right tool for the job.
- Remove no more than 1/3 of the plant at a time.
- Eliminate dead, diseased, dying or rubbing branches first.
- Cut at node (bud) or branching points, but do not cut into the branch collar (bulge at the base of the branch).

Pruning fruit tree tips

- Prune most fruit trees late in the dormant season (Dec-Feb), except cherry trees, to help them heal faster and to prevent disease in the wound.
- Thin branches to allow light to the center of the tree, which helps fruit ripen and strengthens the branches bearing the weight of the fruit.
- Cut the top portion of the tree more heavily than the lower portion.
- Remove branches that are pointing inward towards the center of the tree.
- Research about your fruit tree before pruning, since some trees have special pruning requirements.

Creating a healthy home

With so much time spent inside this year, maintaining indoor air quality is more important than ever, especially during the winter when homes are sealed tight against the cold. Heating systems combined with reduced ventilation can increase the circulation of allergy-inducing dust mites, pet dander and other irritants like mold spores. Add to the list the chemical products we use to maintain the inside of homes. Products such as bleach, paint, air fresheners, and degreasers can all leave harmful residues that can accumulate inside our living spaces. Trapped inside our homes, these pollutants can lead to health risks for children and adults. Fortunately, there are simple and inexpensive ways to help improve indoor air quality. Follow some of our recommendations or find more tips on the [Environmental Protection Agency's](#) indoor air quality webpage.



Cream Scrub for Your Bathroom Sink and Tub

Clean your bathroom sink and tub using this simple do-it-yourself recipe. The safe ingredients are effective on tough dirt and grime and won't release harmful chemicals into the air.

Ingredients:

- Baking Soda
- Castile soap (or another vegetable-based liquid soap)

Directions:

In a small bowl, start with about ½ cup of baking soda. Add liquid soap to baking soda. Mix together with a spoon until the consistency is similar to cake frosting.

Apply the mixture onto a sponge and scrub the bathtub, sink, or shower stall. Rinse.

Tips for quality indoor air

- Clean your home regularly with a non-toxic product to prevent accumulation of pollutants and allergens.
- Take an inventory of your chemicals (for cleaning, home repairs, construction, or car maintenance).
- Get rid of any chemicals you don't use frequently – these can off-gas and affect the air quality inside your home. Call 503-234-3000 for information on what to do with different products.
- Open windows and run fans at least once a month to mix and refresh the air in your home.
- Opt for natural ways to scent your home, such as with an essential oil diffuser instead of plug-ins or room sprays, which often contain harmful chemicals that can affect your health.
- Turn on exhaust fans or open windows when cooking.
- Change the furnace filters frequently; consider a room air purifier with a HEPA filter to help boost air quality.

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