



Why Prune and Trim Bushes and Trees?

The Diocese of Cleveland encompasses almost 1,000 institutions including parishes, schools and health and human service facilities and many of these buildings are landscaped with trees and bushes that require care. Trees and bushes grow, go dormant during the winter and then grow some more. From a seed they grow into a sapling and mature to eventually decline and then dies. While growing, branches and limbs sprout from the main tree and all of them, at some time during their life cycle, require pruning and trimming.

Pruning a tree is different than trimming a tree. Pruning a tree can influence the direction the tree grows. With proper pruning, a tree can be made to grow into a certain configuration of limbs and branches that is more ideal for the structural integrity of the tree. Maintaining the tree's structure helps to lessen the risk of broken limbs and falling branches. In other words, pruning is the removal of unnecessary branches. Trimming, on the hand promotes healthy growth. Each task has a recommended time during the season to perform the work.

As far as a regular tree pruning schedule, mature trees are generally pruned every 3 to 5 years. Younger trees need to be trimmed more often, so 2 to 3 years is preferable. Bushes may need pruning each year to maintain their shape and aesthetic appearance. Depending on the tree, over-pruning will not kill it, but it can destroy its structural integrity. Pruning is used to remove unnecessary branches. It is also desirable to prune bushes and prevent small trees from being planted around buildings in a way that could contribute to an unsafe environment. An example of this is when bushes and small trees obstruct the view of a window. A prowler could be concealed between this high bush or tree and the exterior window allowing the person to look into the facility unnoticed. Another reasons to prune is to control walkways avoiding or restricting use due to overhanging tree limbs.



Prune spring-flowering trees and shrubs right after they finish flowering in spring. Trees and shrubs that bloom during summer and into fall are best pruned in later winter or early spring as soon as their annual growth begins. Trimming, on the other hand, promotes healthy growth and is best done in the summer to remove dead branches when they stand out. Otherwise, between late fall and early spring is best for tree trimming when the tree is dormant. Both services are performed at different times of the year for these reasons and use vastly different pieces of equipment to provide a better aesthetic and healthier landscape.

Removing broken or dead branches is also a good idea because these branches may be diseased and removal should keep the infection from spreading to the good wood. At the same time, over pruning won't stop the bush or tree from growing but it is a way to control its growth and the damage can be extensive. Over time, continued over pruning may lead to branches becoming too weak to tolerate wind or ice loads, or the plant may simply exhaust itself trying to replenish itself.

By pruning and/or cutting dead branches on tree, it lets the other branches grow more evenly and allows for the nutrients to get where they need to go. By removing the dead limb, the tree can now focus on all the healthy limbs.

After pruning, and more importantly after trimming large branches or limbs, these cuts should be sealed just like one would put a bandage on a cut to protect the wound. Tree sealants are recommended to aid in the healing of the cut(s), minimize sap loss from the tree, and protect the tree from decay, insects, and fungi. When trimmed properly, removed tree branches will not grow back. Instead, the tree will grow what looks like a callous over the branch cut, which further helps protect the tree from decay and infection.

Bacteria enter wet tree cuts in the roots, trunk or limbs. Once inside, the bacteria produce gas within the tree. Pressure mounts, and eventually runny liquid seeps out through openings in the bark. The liquid starts out thin and transparent, then becomes a slimy, smelly ooze. Five signs of a diseased or dying tree:

- Bark abnormalities. Tree bark should be continuous without deep cracks or holes.
- Decay. Typically trees decay from the inside out.
- Dead branches. They appear dry and will break easily.
- Leaf discoloration. Leaves should appear healthy when they are in season.

For pruning bushes, one can do this manually or use an electric or battery powered trimmer. Examples of these tools are:

- Hedge trimmers
- Power hedge trimmers
- Anvil and bypass loppers
- Trimmer snips

For trimming trees, one can also do this manually or use electric or battery powered tools including:

- Anvil and bypass loppers
- Pole saw
- Bow saw
- Raked tooth handsaw

Whenever preparing to prune or trim bushes or trees

safety is mandatory. Following the instructions furnished with the tools to be used is important. When a ladder is needed the same safety issues should be followed including the instructions on the ladder itself.

It is always a good idea to seek out professional advice and possibly contract the services of an Arborist educated and trained to care for trees. There are two types of professional arborists: certified and consulting. Certified arborists are equipped to offer planting, pruning, transplanting, fertilizing, monitoring and treatment for insects and diseases, and tree removal. When it comes to bushes and plants, a horticulturist is probably a better reference for advice when needing suggestions on care. There are certified horticulturists trained and educated in their field of expertise.

For a list of pre-qualified landscaping providers, or assistance evaluating your property needs, please contact The Diocese of Cleveland Facilities Services Corporation.

For more information:
facilities@dioceseofcleveland.org

