Pruning Narrowleaf Evergreens
Evergreens have won great favor among home owners and others interested in landscaping during the past few years. They have taken the place of many of our trees and shrubs that lose their leaves each year (deciduous plants). Their green foliage gives fresh life to our winter scenes, and many of us like to believe that they are little or no bother once planted.

But let’s not forget that they require care, the same care as deciduous trees and shrubs. Diseases and insect pests must be checked, physical injuries have to be mended, and a certain amount of watering, fertilizing, and pruning is needed.

Each of these requirements is important, but improper pruning, or none at all, is often the chief cause of unattractive evergreens.

Evergreens may be pruned to keep them from getting too high or wide, to shape them to a desired form, to remove branches which tend to get away from the natural form of tree or shrub, and to make foliage more dense. The exact procedure for pruning varies with the type of evergreen, but there are certain general facts which we need to consider before beginning to prune.

**When to prune**

Since evergreens produce new growth in spring and fall and do not grow much in summer, pruning should be done either before the new growth starts (early spring or late summer) or after it is nearly complete (late spring or late fall).

Evergreens that need only a little pruning should be pruned late, when the new growth is nearly complete. Then the foliage will close over the raw knife wounds. Evergreen trees, shrubs, and hedges will have a neat appearance in summer if trimmed in late spring, or through the winter if trimmed in late fall.

Evergreens requiring a great deal of pruning should be trimmed before the new growth starts. The developing foliage will hide any bare spots exposed by the severe cutting.
Pruning should be started when evergreens are small, usually the first year after they come from the nursery. Then, if they are pruned a little each year, the severe pruning which exposes bare branches will not be necessary. Dead branches should be removed whenever they occur. New foliage from surrounding branches will fill the gap.

How to prune

In pruning keep as close as possible to the natural lines of the evergreen. Normally these are graceful and symmetrical. Trees and shrubs tend to grow back to their natural form, and the gardener who forces them into strange shapes has a difficult task in making them conform to his ideas of beauty. Good taste, as well as practicality, suggests that evergreens meant to provide a pleasing setting for a home should not be pruned to look like animals or furniture.

Always leave some of the new growth on trees or shrubs when pruning. Evergreens actually lose their leaves (needles), although not every year or all at once. Usually they drop those which are several years old. By the time the old needles fall, the new ones at the tip of the branches are thick enough to provide dense foliage. If all the new growth is pruned off, only the old needles will be left and in a few years the branches will be leafless.

Trees and shrubs growing in the shade should be pruned a little every year. Otherwise the foliage becomes loose and open and the branches long and straggling.

See that pruning equipment is sharp when the job is begun. Shears may be used but a knife is better. With a knife you can avoid the stiff, freshly pruned appearance that follows the use of shears.

When using a knife, work from the underside of the branches and slant the cut upward. If the cut is from below, no bark is torn and a clean wound is left. To prevent a formal, clipped effect, make some of your cuts several inches farther into the foliage mass than others.
PINES, SPRUCES, AND FIRS

Pines, spruces, firs, and any other evergreens whose branches tend to be whorled around the main stem seldom need pruning. However, when the growth rate is rapid, an open space, which pruning will remedy, sometimes develops between the upper branches.

Open spaces can be reduced by cutting off half of the terminal shoot, or leader, in spring when the new needles are half developed. Do not cut before the new growth starts or after it is nearly mature because then the terminal shoot will not make any more upward growth. Although a side branch will usually turn upward and carry on the vertical growth, the resulting tree will be more easily broken by ice and storms.

If the tree develops two or three leaders, all but the most desirable one should be cut out in early spring. Trees with more than one leader are less strong and less attractive than those with a single leader.
Lost leaders may be replaced by tying one of the branches in the first whorl to a vertical brace. This is usually done in the spring when the branches are flexible and danger of splitting is not great. Strips of cloth may be used to tie the branches to the brace. Placing the strips loosely around the branches in the manner of a figure eight will allow them to develop without interference. The brace should be removed after one growing season.

Side branches can be kept from growing out of bounds by removing the terminal bud. This will help also to make the trees more bushy.

Trees which have already grown too wide may be narrowed by cutting the branches back to an inner bud. Any resulting sparseness will soon be corrected by new growth.
Among the evergreens which are characterized by numerous buds and branches not growing in whorls are the junipers, yews, arborvitaes, hemlocks, and chamaecyparis. Practically all these plants need pruning. A year after they are brought from the nursery, if they need much pruning, cut them early in the spring or fall; if they need little, wait until late in either season.

When you want to develop a particular shape or dense foliage, pruning should be started when the tree or shrub is young. By pruning every year you will need to remove only the ends of the branches and you will not mar the appearance of the plant.
Evergreens that have been allowed to get too tall or wide may have to be pruned severely. Longer branches should be cut back to an inside side-branch carrying generous foliage. New growth on the old foliage will fill in any open areas.

Exceptionally long branches may be cut back to a point where the stem is bare if the foliage of surrounding branches extends a little beyond the cutting point. New foliage on these branches will hide any gap, or the stem itself may develop foliage.

Yews may be pruned more severely than other evergreens because their branches have dormant buds on the stems. When foliage on the branch is cut off, these buds open and form new foliage.
PRUNING HEDGES

The main thing to consider when pruning evergreen hedges of either of the above types is to keep the bottom of the hedge wider than the top. Then the sun can reach the lower branches and keep them green. If the top is wider than the bottom, leafless branches will develop in the resulting shade.

Late spring or late fall just before the new foliage matures is the best time to prune hedges. At least one inch of the new foliage should be left. When this foliage matures, it covers wounds and gives the hedge an attractive, even, and dense effect.

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