

PRUNING NEEDED EVERGREENS

Most evergreens do not require as much pruning as deciduous plants, and in some cases no pruning is required. Pruning can usually be limited to cutting back part or all of the new growth. When branches need more severe pruning, cut them back to a growing shoot shortly before or just as growth starts in the spring. Avoid autumn pruning. Many evergreens suffer winter damage and their shape may be ruined if they have been heavily pruned. Never prune any needled evergreen back to brown or bare areas of the stem. The plant will rarely fill in and may even die. With the exception of yews and arborvitae hedges, do not shear evergreens.

Trim formal hedges as often as necessary to shape them and to thin out the shoots. You can remove the top leaders of coniferous evergreens such as pines, firs, and spruce to keep the plant shorter and denser, although they may lose their conical shape. If you leave the top leader, the plant will grow taller and more open. If two leaders develop, cut out the weaker one. Selective pruning as opposed to wholesale pruning will yield better, safer results. Dead, diseased or broken branches may be removed at any time of the year.

Avoid pruning of any kind in the fall.

Some common evergreens and their specific pruning requirements are as follows:

Prune and shape arborvitae in the early spring before new growth appears. To maintain size and shape, prune in late spring and early summer.

Pines and spruce should be pruned in late spring. This will allow enough time for the shoots to produce a new set of buds.

Firs, Douglas firs, and spruce should be pruned in late winter when they are dormant. This will allow enough time for the shoot to produce a new set of buds

For yews and hemlocks, prune or shear in late winter or early spring before new growth begins.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

https://www.canr.msu.edu/lawn_garden/

<https://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach/>