

Hints for pruning Christmas greens given

DOVER, Del. — Many people like to prune their evergreens now in order to get greens for holiday decorations. Properly done, this can provide one with the needed greens and at the same time benefit his plants, points out University of Delaware Extension horticulturist Dr. Charles Dunham.

The objectives of pruning are to improve a plant's symmetry and natural form, to promote better balanced and healthier growth, and to control the height or spread of the plant. A person should

always make his pruning cut at a joint in a branch, so that the remaining leaves cover and hide the cut. Pruned in this way, any plant can be shaped without the appearance of having just received a scalp job.

Both needle and broadleaf evergreens make attractive Christmas decorations. To make arrangements, one may need a few branches that are 12 to 15 inches long, but the majority of materials for both centerpieces and wreaths need to be no longer than four to six inches, says Dunham.

A person can obtain the larger pieces by removing unwanted branches and by severe heading back of vigorous growth. Foundation plantings, for example, should have an air space between each other and between each plant and the house. This often requires the removal or hard pruning of some branches. Such pruning being done now is a good way to get the longer greens wanted.

Short pieces of plant material are obtained by a type of pruning called tipping. This, as the name suggests, is the removal of the tip of the shoot. Tipping accomplishes two things—it shortens the branch, and at the same time it forces growth of side branches, thus giving a more compact plant. Done with a pair of hand shears or a pruning knife, tipping should provide one with all the four-to-six-inch pieces of greenery you need for decorating, leaving a very natural-looking plant in the process. (Tipping done with a pair of electric hedge shears may give greens, but it also produces the unnaturally shaped plant mounds that sometimes appear in the front yards of homeowners who don't understand how to prune.)

Any evergreen can be used for Christmas greenery, but some kinds are better than others. Boxwood, with its dense, fine texture, is especially popular. But many Japanese hollies are a good substitute. All of the hollies—American, English and Chinese—are excellent for the purpose. And, of course, they have desirable red berries.

Of the pines, the fine, flexible, bright green

needles of the white pine are best, says the horticulturist. But other pines are also very satisfactory. All of the spruces make excellent wreaths. However, the Colorado spruce holds its needles much better than the Norway.

Hemlock is another effective green, but it does not hold its needles well. If used in an arrangement where the stems will be in water, this is no problem, though.

In pruning the larger evergreens like pine, spruce and hemlock, a person can get his greens by removing unneeded branches. Both pine and hemlock will respond to tipping, but more care should be used with the spruces and not overprune. On older trees it's possible to remove or tip side shoots without spoiling the plant's basic symmetry.

Both yews and junipers are good sources of greenery, too. The dark green needles of yew are especially good and the plants tolerate pruning well.

The evergreen magnolia is one of the most handsome of cut greens. These should be pruned carefully so as not to leave branch stubs on the tree.

Even rhododendrons can be pruned now for holiday decorations. Like the magnolia, one should prune them back to forked branches and leave a clean, smooth cut. Many rhododendrons need pruning anyway to keep them in scale with their setting and to keep them compact, so such pruning can be very beneficial. One may wish to avoid removing branches with flower buds, though, if concerned about the number

of blooms one will get next spring.

In using any greens, Dunham has one caution. A person can be aware of the potential fire hazard of these

materials, and remember that those which are kept in water will last much longer. When using greens without water, one should avoid burning candles near them, also keeping them away from heaters, electric lights, the TV, and other heat sources.

WHAT'S NEW

HUMUS CONVERTER

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mulated to include selected nitrogen fixing microorganisms to supply nitrogen to the cellulose digesting bacterial and fungi. This symbiotic activity not only increases the nitrogen content of the soil through atmospheric nitrogen fixation but also helps to reduce plant residues to humus. Hence, there is a reduced need for nitrogen fertilizers.

Cellu-Gest is economical to use. According to the manufacturer, one pound mixed in 25 gallons of water is sufficient to treat one acre of field. It should be plowed or disc harrowed within 24 hours of application. Early Fall is the recommended time of application.

Cellu-Gest is supplied in 25 pound and 100 pound plastic lined fiber drums. For additional information, contact Dr. Howard E. Worne, Bioferm International, Inc., 209 Chester Ave., Moorestown, N.J. 08057.

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