

Cold temps and pruning shrubs don't mix

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Holy cow why did winter have to wait so long to get here? This past week really stunk (is that a word) in terms of temperatures and plant damage.

It's really a good thing I skipped a week before introducing the topic of rejuvenating and pruning shrubs. You might have had some plant damage to the newly pruned branches.

It's terribly disappointing as this was the first year that my Hellebores were going to be spectacular. They have taken several years to establish and they were full of flower buds.

I cut some and took them in the house along with daffodils. I expect the plant to survive but not the flowers.

In addition, my star and saucer magnolias were just beginning to show color and I have noticed that the outside buds are brown.

I expect that we might experience damage to some of our fruit tree flowers such as apple and peach.

If you have these trees, cut a flower bud from the tree and with a very sharp knife, slice through the flower. If the center is brown, it's not going to make it.



Freeze damage on saucer magnolia.

Let's move on to pruning and rejuvenating those overgrown shrubs.

Many deciduous landscape shrubs that have gotten tall and lanky and overgrown or have outgrown their location may be in need of a total rejuvenation.

The shrubs that respond well to this technique include forsythia, weigela, ninebark, hydrangea, flowering cherry and almonds, spiraea, cotoneaster, shrub dogwood and more.

Because these shrubs store their energy in their roots through the winter, cutting them back to the crown of the plant now is the easiest way to rejuvenate them.

Don't cut them clear back to the ground, just to those branches that come out of the crown of the plant. And keep in mind that if these are early spring flowering plants such as forsythia, you won't have flowers this year.

You will, however, have a nice looking compact plant that you can start over in terms of keeping it pruned and in shape.

Evergreen shrubs don't respond the same as these deciduous. They store their energy in the leaves that remain on the plant all year.

The harder you cut them back, the long it will take them to recover. Therefore, the recommendation is to cut them back to pencil-sized wood.

Large overgrown shrubs such as lilacs and viburnums can be completely rejuvenated in the spring or you can simply remove the larger, older branches clear back to the ground. The new growth then becomes the plant.

I hope that we are out of the woods in terms of freezing temperatures as these can cause damage to freshly cut woody tissue!