



Gardeners Helping Gardeners Succeed

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All About Pruning Pines

Pruning is an important maintenance practice. Although necessary, pruning can be kept to a minimum by the wise and proper placement of plant materials in the landscape design. Evergreen plants can be divided into two broad categories: (1) Narrowleaf (needled) evergreens such as pines, junipers, spruce, yews, and (2) Broadleaf evergreens like rhododendrons, hollies, and boxwood. The narrowleaf evergreens are generally more rapidly growing, include many tree forms, and are commonly grown for their foliage only.

Why prune?

Limit the pruning of most evergreens to the removal of dead, diseased, and mechanically injured wood, and the maintenance of the natural shape of the plants. However, certain plants may be grown for special purposes, and may require special pruning. This would apply when formal effects are desired, such as clipped hedges, topiary, espaliers, and so forth. In addition, many evergreens are pruned during the Christmas season by homeowners who desire cut greens for holiday decorations.

When to prune?

Dead, diseased, and broken wood can be removed at any time of year. However, for general pruning the best time is in late winter or early spring just before growth begins. Narrowleaf evergreens may be pruned a second time in June before the new growth has matured. It may be necessary to give particularly fast-growing plants an additional light pruning or two during the growing season.

How to prune

It is important to have the necessary tools in proper working order for pruning your plants. These tools include a hand pruner, lopping shears, hedge shears, and a curved pruning saw. When it comes to pruning evergreens, and pines in particular, you should use the two methods listed below, tipping and removal.

Tipping

Wait to prune until early June when new growth for the year has elongated and the new needles have developed. At this time, break the top one inch of new growth off all of the candles. This will cause twice as many buds to set for the following year and in turn will cause the tree to develop twice as many branches which will create a thick dense pine.

Removal

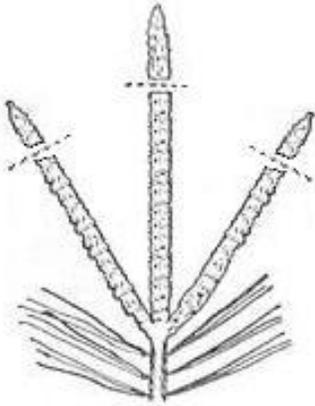
If you have a pine that is getting too large, limit its' size by the removal and tipping procedures. These plants grow only once during the year—in the late spring to early summer. During this time the buds set on the previous year's growth.

Step one, removal, travel down the longest portion of the branch or stem to a point where the other branches radiate out, then observe that those branches have growth at their terminals. Cut the main branch off just above the whorl of branches. Now you have shortened the branch.

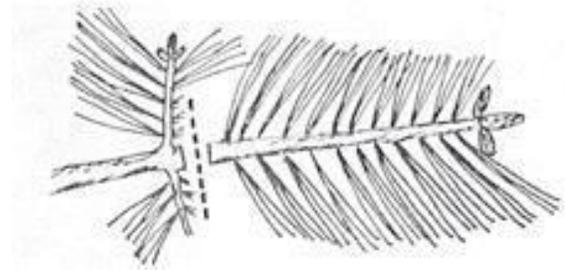
Step two now requires you to break the candle in half during May/June. This growth has the softer needles so you can tell where to break the branch at the candle.

By breaking the new candle in half you have reduced that year's growth by half and started the process to fill in the holes caused by the removal process during the following year. Continue to keep after the breaking process every year from then on and your evergreen will be dense, healthy, and it will be able to fit into its site.

With spruce, tipping will allow you to keep it full and confined. With junipers follow the removal process but remember you will not find a whorl of branches as there is only one, so choose wisely.



Tipping - breaking one inch of new growth from the pine 'candles'



Removal - cutting a side branch of a pine just above a whorl in early spring