



Question of the Week

Q. Can I prune lilacs now?

A. Lilac pruning will have to wait. Summer, fall or winter pruning sacrifices next spring's flowers. Prune lilacs immediately after flowering in the spring. Most lilacs flower from mid-May to the first of June, though flowering time is highly dependent on the species, cultivars, and spring weather conditions.

Once lilacs are well established, annual pruning immediately after bloom will improve their vigor and appearance. Common lilacs grow much more slowly and produce many more shoots than the hybrid varieties. The goal of pruning is to maintain a clump of seven to 10 stems of different ages. How many to remove will depend on the variety and plant vigor. Cut a third of the oldest wood to the ground at 3-year intervals. The oldest wood of lilacs is more susceptible to infestations of borers and scale insects. Also, thinning out vigorous top growth will increase flower bud formation by allowing sunlight to reach the center of the plant. Pruning not only can help lilacs produce more blooms, but will also help in pest prevention.

An exception to the "only after bloom" timing for pruning: If you find dead, broken, diseased and dying wood, prune as soon as you detect damage regardless of the time of the year. Damaged branches provide prime points of entry for insect pests and diseases. The most common damage seen after a long winter is breakage, the result of windstorms and the weight of snow and ice on branches.

Got questions? UNH Cooperative Extension's Family, Home & Garden Education Center Info Line offers practical help finding answers for your lawn and garden questions. Call toll free at 1-877-398-4769, M-F, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., or e-mail us at answers@unh.edu