

Conifer Pruning Times

By Mark Halcomb, UT Extension Area Nursery Specialist

Plants ready to sell should be sheared lightly in late winter and little to none in the preceding summer. Read over the entire article for a better understanding.

White pines should be pruned in late June or early July, (a little later at higher elevations.) Remember July 4th! The job must be completed in time for the buds to set for next year.

Virginia pines may require 2-3 shearings per year depending on the growth and beginning when they reach 3 feet tall. Late April and mid July are normal times.

Shear **Scotch pines** after the white pines.

(Norway, White, Colorado) **Spruce and firs** are shaped in late summer or early fall while the weather is still agreeable. They naturally develop many lateral buds along the current leader; therefore, it is not necessary to shear to get good bud set. Shearing should be lighter than for pines to obtain the same quality.

Shaping begins by using a hand pruner to cut back the leader to about 12 inches. Make the cut above a strong bud and at an angle down towards that bud (contrary to normal pruning close to a bud). To prevent forking, break off any buds near the one selected. Proceed to shear lateral branches to obtain a cone shape using hedge shears or knives.

Use the hand pruner to remove 'turn backs'. Such erratic shoots interfere with normal branch development, particularly in Fraser Fir.

(From UT Ag Exp Station Bulletin 641, 1985 by Thor)

Hemlocks generally require more than 1 annual shearing. Avoid pruning within 6 weeks of frost, but they can be pruned in mid to late winter if they need it. (Late summer pruning would force a flush of growth that would surely be winter killed.) A mid to late winter or early spring shearing followed by a mid summer shearing might be a good plan.

Other than to avoid pruning within 6 weeks of frost, there does not appear to be any other restrictions on time of pruning of the following conifers. I surveyed several conifer growers in the area and checked the literature. While young plants require foliage in order to grow, it is good to shear young plants (year 1-3) to force the canopy to thicken.

Best Plan for best quality: A shearing in mid to late winter or early spring allows the new spring growth to fill in the voids. Follow that with a mid summer shearing or touch up after the spring flush. This prevents too much energy wasted on long shoots.

Second Best Plan: I can see one shearing could be done in either late winter or around June. When would labor have more time? One pruning per year will be forced to cut off a lot of growth in order to force voids and blank sides to fill in.

Some nurseries surveyed wanted to be done by June 1, others by July 1. Either should allow the summer growth to cover the fresh cuts, fill in some of the voids and not be killed by the first frost. I gathered these nurseries were not pruning any in late winter.

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Green Giant Arborvitae (*Thuja plicata* 'Green Giant')

Leyland Cypress (*x Cuprocyparis leylandii*)

Carolina Sapphire Cypress (*Cupressus arizonica* var. *glabra* 'Carolina Sapphire')

Yoshino Japanese Cedar (*Cryptomeria japonica* var. *sinensis* 'Yoshino')

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