

Ask a Master Gardener Article

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When should we prune crape myrtle and azaleas?

Q. Both crape myrtle and azaleas will be blooming soon. When should they be pruned? Can they be pruned at the same time?

A. These questions are asked every year, and they are good ones to ask. Because flowering ornamentals set their flower buds at different times, they should be pruned at different times. When you expect your plants to look their prettiest and they don't it is frustrating. Pruning at the correct time can help plants look their best.

Many spring-flowering plants such as azalea, dogwood, forsythia, redbud and rhododendron set flower buds before the fall, so pruning during the fall or winter months eliminates or decreases their spring flower display. Azaleas set their flower buds in the summer, so by July the flower buds are already set. If you wait until after June to prune azaleas, you will be cutting off any chance of blooms the following spring. If you prune an azalea after it finishes blooming in the spring you will not bother its buds.

Plants that typically flower during the summer form flower buds on new growth and can be pruned during the winter with no effect on their flowering. Examples of this type of plant are crape myrtle, abelia and beautyberry.

As a general rule, plants that flower before May should be pruned after they bloom, while those that flower after May are considered summer-flowering and can be pruned just prior to spring growth. One exception to this rule is the oakleaf hydrangea, a summer-flowering shrub that forms flower buds the previous season. Another exception is late-flowering azalea cultivars, which bloom during May, June or even July. Prune both the oakleaf hydrangea and the azalea cultivars after they bloom.

Ornamental plants that are not grown for their showy flowers can be pruned during the late winter, spring or summer months. Avoid pruning during the fall or early winter because it may encourage tender new growth that is not sufficiently hardened to resist the winter cold.

Some shade and flowering trees tend to bleed or excrete large amounts of sap from pruning wounds. Among these trees are maple, birch, dogwood, beech, elm, willow, flowering plum and flowering cherry. Sap excreted from the tree is not harmful, but it is unsightly. To minimize bleeding, prune these trees after the leaves have matured. Leaves use plant sap when they expand, and the tree excretes less sap from the wound.

For more information, see the publication *Pruning Ornamental Plants in the Landscape*. You may download the publication at extension.uga.edu or you may ask for a copy at the UGA extension office at 900 Newnan Road.

Perhaps the following chart will come in handy for your questions of when to prune some of your plants.

Prune after Flowering

Azalea
Japanese Pieris
Beautybush
Lilac
Bigleaf hydrangea
Mockorange
Bradford Pear
Oakleaf hydrangea
Bridalwreath Spirea
Pearlbush
Clematis
Pyracantha
Climbing roses
Redbud
Crabapple
Saucer Magnolia
Deutzia
Star Magnolia
Dogwood
Shrub Honeysuckle
Doublefile Vibernum
Thunberg Spirea
Flowering Almond
Vanhoutte Spirea
Flowering Cherry
Weigelia
Flowering Quince
Winter Daphne
Forsythia
Wisteria
Japanese Kerria
Witchhazel

Prune before Spring Growth Begins

Beautyberry
Goldenrain Tree
Camellia
Japanese Barberry
Chaste Tree (Vitex)
Japanese Spirea
Cranberrybush Viburnum
Mimosa

Crape myrtle
Nandina
Floribunda roses
Rose-of-Sharon (Althea)
FrAGRANT Tea Olive
Sourwood
Grandiflora roses
Anthony Waterer Spirea
Glossy Abelia
Sweetshrub
Hedges

For more information on all of your horticulture questions, contact a Carroll County Master Gardener Volunteer at the UGA Extension Office at 900 Newnan Road, Carrollton. 770-836-8546 or via email at ccmg@uga.edu.