

A Greener View: Pruning during dormant season won't hurt trees

by Jeff_Rugg

Q: Our area recently received a lot of ice and snow. Some of our trees were bent over during the storm, but seem to be recovering after most of it melted off. My problem lies with some larger trees that have broken or cracked limbs. They are in the backyard and have provided us with a lot of shade so I don't want to lose them. How soon should I have them pruned? Can they be damaged more by cutting them while they are frozen?

A: You should have your trees looked at as soon as possible by a licensed arborist. It is the duty of all property owners to maintain their whole property in a hazard-free condition, which includes your trees. Ice damage may not be completely noticeable from the ground and an arborist can determine if they need to inspect them by climbing.

Remember, proper pruning of mature trees never involves topping or leaving large stubs.

If the trees need to be pruned for safety or health, they can be cut at any time it is safe for people to do the work. Anywhere in the country, and even without storm damage, dormant pruning has several advantages for most trees. For one, the whole structure can be seen without any leaves blocking the view. There is less organic material to dispose of because there are no leaves. The new growth in the spring will go into healthy branches rather than into branches that are going to be cut off.

Dormant pruning attracts fewer insect and disease problems, too. A few trees, such as some maples, bleed a lot of sap in the spring that may make the tree unsightly for a while, but it is not harmful to the tree.

Q: I have fed birds in my backyard for years, and enjoy it so much as I have a lot of different types of birds. Last year, pigeons began to show up. Now they are all over the feeders and the ground underneath. Do you have any solutions to this problem?

I live in Southern California at the foot of some mountains. Thank you for any input you can give.

A: I assume by "pigeon" that you mean the common bird found in city parks that strut around begging for handouts. Ornithologists used to call it the rock dove, but they changed the name to rock pigeon a while back. Meanwhile, we all will keep calling them pigeons and a few other not-so-nice names. They can be gluttonous at times and especially so if they are in a large flock.

I know that you are getting a wider variety of birds to your yard because of your variety of feeders, but you should modify that for a while. For a little while - maybe two weeks or more - you should reduce the styles of feeders to those that pigeons can't use.

You should also either sweep up any seed that falls out or use feeders that have small trays to keep seeds from falling to the ground, but not a big enough tray for the pigeons to use as a perch. Some feeders have a perch that is adjustable for a bird's weight to keep out the larger birds. Some have a cage around the feeding stations that small birds can get through that prevents larger birds from feeding.

Pigeons will eat just about any type of food, but you could try limiting the foods to just nyjer seed and maybe a finch mix of very small seeds.

Q: Recently, you told us about counting birds. In our yard, that's getting to be hard to do because hawks come in our yard on a daily basis looking for small birds. They don't bother the doves and the large black birds, just the smaller birds. Do you know any way we can discourage this? Any tips would be greatly appreciated.

A: There are only a few hawks that eat other birds native to North America. They are not common over most of the country, except in the winter. During the winter, many people feed birds and they notice the hawks more because they are watching the feeders more.

Unfortunately, there is nothing you can do to prevent the hawks from doing what they have to do to survive. You can stop feeding the birds, but you may not want to do that for the sake of the small birds. In the winter, birds that frequently eat at feeders are better able to survive the cold weather. They have more energy in reserve for staying warm and for escaping hawks. A well-fed bird that is healthy has a better chance at escaping a hawk than does a bird that isn't in tip-top shape.

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