

In the Garden

Prune away your troubles



For further amusement I offer you a selection of spectacular pruning fails.



Oh I love to prune! Get out those rusty secateurs, put on a bit of oil, a little rub on the old whetstone and off we go! My problem is, as always, one of misplaced time wasting enthusiasms. The difficulty with being a self-aware kind of person is that I KNOW my faults in the garden. I try to reason with myself too. This does not work because of one thing alone – gardening is fun. It's big fun, with colours and textures, new and curious plants, and lovely rich dirt. I could go on for hours about that lovely dirt but this is an investigation of pruning.

Most people do not know how to prune. Well duh, it's not like there is mandatory pruning school in grade 5! Fortunately for me I attended the master gardener training and learned how to prune properly. Although, and this is not a fabrication, Barb Kohlman (our

instructor) had to tell me to share the bush I was pruning. I am a pruning hog but there is a reason. There is nothing so nice as stepping back from the pruning you just did and let out a most satisfied sigh.

Enough of the babble, how do you prune? First you need to understand what kind of plant are you pruning. Some plants are self-pruning and require nothing. Trees like our wonderful red cedar *Thuja plicata* needs nothing. Fruit trees however, need lots of pruning. Once again timing is king. Apple trees need to be pruned in late winter/early spring. You need to follow a few rules. Take out all the branches that are dead or damaged. There will be a lot this year after Snowmagedon. Next, look for diseased branches - these will be misshapen, cankerous, cracked or blistered. You want to open the

canopy up so lots of light and air gets into the tree. Try to take out excess branches or dumb looking ones that make no sense. You are looking for a vase shape. By the way those little short branches are the fruit spurs. Don't prune them off. The best advice I got in Pruning class was to be cautious. Prune in thirds. That is, one-third this year, one-third the second year and the last third in the third year. This way if you have a spectacular pruning fail you've only done it to 1/3rd of the plant! My parting word is about roses. Prune roses when the Forsythia blooms, and prune them as if your worst enemy was pruning them. For exact instructions come and see the master gardener clinics at your local garden centres or check out the Mill Bay Garden Club 4th Tuesday every month at the Mill Bay Hall 6:45.

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