

Your garden in February

Winter pruning

Winter is the perfect time for pruning and renovating many trees and shrubs. Without leaves you can clearly see the framework of branches, spot signs of disease and it is much easier to get in amongst the plant with your loppers.

Trees

Pruning large trees and hedges is a job for the professionals. Do **not** be tempted up a ladder with a chainsaw.

Even for smaller trees, safety is paramount. Think about where the branches are likely to fall and keep children and animals away.



Cut back larger branches in stages so as not to damage the main stem. Start with an undercut to halfway, then cut downwards from the top. You may need to do this a few times until the branch is removed.

Branches should not be cut back flush to the main trunk or left with a large snag as these will cause dieback or poor healing. The best place is just outside the 'collar', which is a distinct bulge all the way around the branch.

As with all pruning the main purpose is to remove dead, diseased or crossing wood in order to create a healthy open-centred tree.

If you live in a conservation area, or your trees have Tree Preservation Orders on them, then you'll need permission from the local planning department unless the tree is dying, dead or dangerous. It is always best to check first with your Tree Officer.

Wait until mid to late summer to prune trees in the Prunus family (cherries, plums and almonds) to avoid silverleaf, a fungal infection which gradually weakens the tree.

Hedges

Now is also a good time to trim or renovate deciduous hedges such as beech and hornbeam.

You must first check that there are no birds nesting as it is an offence to damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built.

If the hedge is very overgrown it is best to cut it back in stages. If reducing both the width and the height of the hedge, cut back the top and one side in the first year, and cut the other side the following year. If recovery is poor delay the second cut for another 12 months.

When reducing the height of a hedge, cut hard back to 15-20cm (6-8in) below the final desired height.