

In my column last week, I indicated that February and March were the ideal months to prune deciduous trees and shrubs. In closing that article, I also mentioned that this week I'd share with you some of the recommended procedures for proper pruning. There's been a change in plans.

Having survived one of the largest snowstorms in recent years, I've discovered, not only did this snowstorm take its toll on human and animal life, it also took its toll on plant life, namely shrubs.

On the south side of our home is a privet hedge, separating our yard from our neighbor's, and it runs half the length of our property. Through the years we've kept this hedge formally trimmed to a height of nearly seven feet. Following the recent snowstorm, we



shockingly discovered that this tightly sheared, upright hedge was no longer upright. The fourteen inches of heavy snow that fell during the storm caused our



hedge to bend nearly to the ground. Further examination of our landscape revealed numerous other shrubs, and particularly our evergreen shrubs, brutally bent under the weight of snow.

It's a fact. The weight of snow and ice causes limbs not only to bend but also to break. How one deals with such damage can readily impact the

health of the shrub for years to come. The question might be what can and what should one do to help shrubs after experiencing this type of damage.

Upon discovering our beautiful upright hedge buried beneath the snow, Rita wanted immediately to help by trying to remove the snow. I encouraged her to wait. With so much snow covering the hedge, the entangled branches were difficult to approach, and because they were buried beneath a mantle of white, it was nearly impossible to determine the severity of any damage.



In this scenario, doing nothing and being patient until the snow melts should be the first line of “inaction.” Immediately following a storm of this magnitude, little can be done to help. Often attempting to help causes

more damage. It is generally better to wait and to assess the damage once the snow has melted. Fortunately, if only small limbs and twigs are damaged, the shrub will likely make a full recovery on its own. If many large branches are broken, the shrub may be able to recover with constructive pruning and with time.

If one insists that he or she must immediately remove the snow, the key approach is to be gentle. Sweep the snow off the branches with a broom. Always sweep upward. Sweep from the bottom up. Sweeping from the top down can easily result in more broken branches. If the snow is frozen onto the branches and does not dislodge, stop and allow the snow and ice to melt naturally.

Furthermore, avoid shaking shrubs to remove snow. This type of action often causes additional breakage due to frozen conditions.

Once the snow is gone, and if breakage is discovered, all is not lost. Most deciduous shrubs damaged by snow and ice can be severely pruned if necessary. I hate to think of it, but our seven foot privet hedge will do fine should it become necessary we cut it back within a couple feet of the ground level. By allowing it to regrow, full recovery should be attained in two or more seasons. Bear in mind, spring blooming shrubs, if cut back after a snowstorm, will not bloom the following spring. Broken broadleaf evergreen shrubs such as azaleas, boxwood, and hollies can also be pruned in this manner.

Unfortunately, if severely broken, conifers —such as junipers, arborvitae, and yews —will not recover and will probably need to be removed.

It's understandable that following a large snowstorm wanting to help shrubs recover from any damage is of major concern. The main thing to remember is — **patience.**