



# ask

**Celebrating 21 Years!**  
**the landscape professional**  
 Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

## Welcome to my weekly series!

Email or mail your questions to: [info@sprigsandtwigs.net](mailto:info@sprigsandtwigs.net) or  
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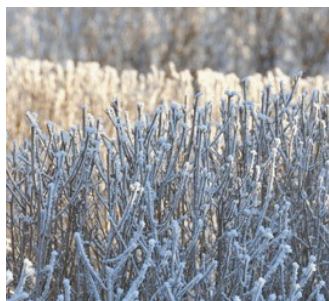
**Question this Week:** *A few weeks ago you answered a question regarding trees that they could be pruned any time of year. Can hedges be also pruned anytime? We usually prune our hedges twice a year but last year we only did it once and now they are quite tall. Can I cut them back now, or do I have to wait until springtime?... Mary*

### Linda's Answer:

Hi Mary,

I would wait to cut back your hedges until late April or May. At that time, the sap is rising from the roots of the plant into the stems to produce new growth and leaves. If the hedge is pruned then, the pruning will stimulate new stem growth and thicken the shrub. If you prune your hedges now while they are dormant, the hedge will not produce new growth and it will remain thin and sparse. In the case of trees, generally we are not trying to stimulate new growth, so pruning can be done in winter as well. For some trees however, like fruit trees and birch, it's best to prune in their dormant season. If they were to be pruned in the spring as the sap is rising, the sap would 'bleed' or ooze from the wounds of pruning.

When you prune, use sharp hand pruners and loppers for the larger branches; do not use hedge shears (e.g., hand shears (like scissors), electric or gas), because they will not cut the woody stems cleanly and will damage the plant by tearing the stem creating broken, uneven cuts that allow a pathway for insects and disease to enter the plant. Do not prune in a straight line across the top and down the sides of the hedge. Prune the stems at various heights down from the top and in from the sides by reaching into the hedge. This method will promote new growth that will thicken the hedge from the inside out. Overall, you should prune the hedge in a somewhat tapered shape, narrower at the top than at the bottom. If hedges are pruned straight up and down or wider across the top than at the bottom, sunlight will not be able to reach the lower part of the plant and you see die-back of the lower branches. Only use hedge shears during the growing season and only on the non-woody (green) growth. Hedge shears are only intended for formal shearing in straight lines, they have no other purpose. If you only use hedge shears and never prune your hedges as I described above, your hedges will become very thick at the top and sides but will have a hollow inside, which is the perfect cool, dark environment for disease and insects.



*Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 21 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..*

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