

## “Spring Grooming”

Diane Threlkeld

3/9/11

It's been just over a month since Punxsutawney Phil declared there would be only two more weeks of winter... ha! But if anyone is prepared for the unexpected, it's Jefferson County gardeners. So, hopefully with our snow storms and frost behind us, it's time to do some spring grooming in our gardens.

Before you grab the shears and head outside, take a minute to think about the *why*, *when*, and *what* of pruning:

- **Why?** Many of us are tempted to prune because something just doesn't "look right." But some real reasons to cut back plants are: 1) to keep plants healthy, 2) to direct growth, 3) to improve quality of flowers and fruit and 5) to maintain safety.
- **When?** Pruning of many evergreen and deciduous plants can be done in late winter or early spring before new growth emerges and after the danger of frost has passed. Step carefully in your garden to avoid new growth, especially near the base of plants.
- **What?** There are several plants just begging for your attention. Roses respond to pruning by producing new, stronger leaves and buds. The old saying, "Prune your roses when the forsythia blooms," is often timely. Ornamental grasses which die back completely in the winter can be rejuvenated by cutting the entire plant back to within about 3-5 inches of the ground in early spring. Wait too long and you risk cutting off tips of the new season's growth. Evergreen varieties in good condition shouldn't be cut back, just cleaned up by removing any dead growth and trimming off any diseased foliage. Sword ferns' old fronds may be cut back to the ground before new growth begins. Lavender and rosemary should be trimmed gently to shape and take off last year's spent blooms. A variety of shrubs like mock orange, Indian plum, Oregon grape, ocean spray, lilac and weigela can be thinned at this time.

Sources for spring grooming specifics are Seattle Tilth's *Maritime Northwest Gardening Guide*, Mary Robson's *Gardening in Washington & Oregon (Month-by-Month)* and Cass Turnbull's *Guide to*

*Pruning: What, When, Where & How to Prune for a More Beautiful Garden.* See <http://mg.jefferson.wsu.edu/> for master gardener plant clinic hours.