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Christie Dustman Art of Pruning

JAMAICA PLAIN | MASSACHUSETTS

FOR CHRISTIE DUSTMAN, good pruning is the key to maintaining the framework of established gardens. If all you think about when you set out to prune is that you want to reduce a tree or shrub's size, there is a good chance that the plant's future health and shape will be compromised.

"Our maintenance services focus on maintaining the vigor and natural character of plant material and cultivating the design intent of the garden," said Dustman, principal of Christie Dustman & Company, a garden design and plant care firm in Roslindale. "Our style of pruning focuses on increasing bloom, maintaining air circulation and light inside plants, as well as enhancing the spirit and shape of the plants."

Pruning just above a fork in the branches or above a healthy leaf are basic instructions for pruning, but it is important to step back frequently and really consider what the ultimate shape of the plant will be, and what direction the branches will grow. Obviously, when branches are rubbing against each other one must go, but it is important to look at the overall structure of the plant to determine which one should be maintained. Pruning solely on the outside of the plant will result in a blob with a hollow interior, and plants will usually decline due to such treatment. It is also essential to know the growth habits of the species being pruned to avoid lopping off all of next year's flower buds, for example, or stimulating growth during a season where new shoots would be killed by frost.

It is very helpful to watch an experienced gardener prune before shaping your own plants. While some landscapers prefer to complete

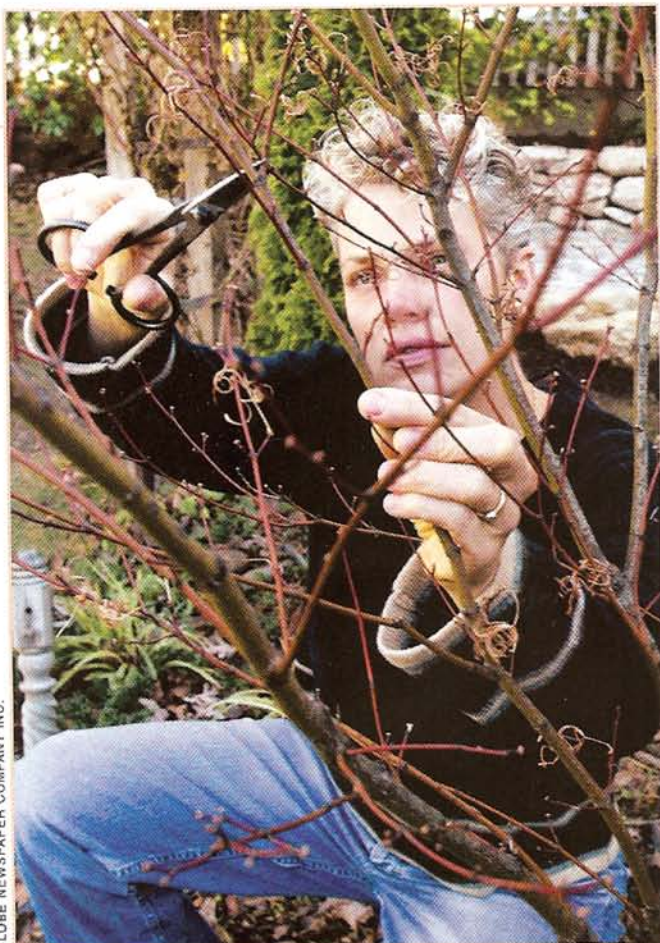
their tasks and then present the finished result, Dustman welcomes more personal involvement so that clients can become more knowledgeable about the process of landscape maintenance. An unusual service she offers is garden mentoring.

"We mentor gardeners in the fine art and science of plant care by working in the client's garden while explaining why

and how to do each maintenance activity," she said. An indispensable book that Dustman regularly recommends to her clients is *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden: Planting & Pruning Techniques* by Tracy DiSabato-Aust (Timber Press, 1998).

Choosing the right tool for each task, and a tool that is comfortable to use, is vital. Dustman prefers hand tools and uses PX and PXR Ergo pruners by Bahco. These pruners have vertically declined blades, fixed or rotating handles, and three handle sizes to custom fit any hand. In addition to pruning shears, she relies heavily on her Japanese saw for thicker branches and trunks.

Dustman has exhibited her work at the New England Flower Show, and her design talent also can be seen at The Goddess Garden at Elm Bank in Wellesley. The garden's focal points are the statues of Flora, Ceres and Pomona that once graced the Massachusetts Horticultural Society's second Horticultural Hall, built near the end of the Civil War. Her clients' gardens and her own also have been on numerous tours, including the Massachusetts Organic Garden Tour. — Laura Eisener



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Christie's Criteria

"We use hand tools for a detailed and precise style of garden maintenance," Dustman said, adding that hand tools are more versatile than power tools and help prevent the accidental removal of branches.