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Enjoy the Flowers Before Pruning Spring Shrubs

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GARDEN NOTES

ENJOY THE FLOWERS BEFORE PRUNING SPRING SHRUBS

By Dennis Hinkamp

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You can track the progress of spring by the colors of the flowering shrubs moving from south to north through the state.

The most popular spring bloomer is probably Forsythia, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. The bright yellow flowers covering the branches usually signal the arrival of warmer weather. "When Forsythia is at its peak, the Daphne begins to flower, filling the air with its heavenly fragrance," he says. Daphne is a low growing shrubs that is often grouped with perennials. The flowers are white to pink and are very fragrant. It is worth getting down on your knees to smell their lovely aroma.

He says after the Daphnes come the Spireas and the Flowering Quince. Spirea are medium-sized shrubs with white to pink blossoms. Flowering Quince has large flowers ranging in color from red to bright orange. It can be pruned and kept small or allowed to grow into a 3 to 5 foot shrub. It also has thorns, which can be a point in its favor if it is being used as privacy barrier, or a negative, if a ball wanders too close and gets sucked into its treacherous grasp.

"One tall shrub that blooms a little after the Quince is the Cistena Plum," Goodspeed continues. "This shrub, if left unpruned, grows into a small tree. The white to pink fragrant flowers are small but attractive. This purple-leafed plant is also often used for a specimen plant in a group, or as an informal hedge."

Kerria is an uncommon plant that looks great when in bloom, he says, but looks a little awkward and leggy the rest of the year. The double yellow flowers are striking. It is great in the background where other plants can hide its location once the flowers are gone.

The last to bloom in early spring are Lilacs and Viburnum. They come in all sizes and shapes. The fragrant varieties have a pleasant smelling bloom, Goodspeed says.

"One thing all these spring blooming shrubs have in common is that they should only be pruned after they bloom," Goodspeed cautions. "If these plants are pruned in the winter, much of the flowering wood will be removed. Pruning after they blossom allows new floral wood to grow throughout the summer for a fragrant, colorful show again the next spring."

He says when pruning is called for, remove about a third of the older canes right to the

ground. This encourages new growth, and keeps the plants small and in control. It also ensures that they maintain their natural shape, preventing that “bad hair cut” or “plateau” look. Annual pruning and cleaning will keep most shrubs healthy and productive.

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