

Proper Pruning

These recommendations are a broad overview of pruning methods. Your Horticulturist will provide specific information for your plants.

Considerations Before Pruning

Pruning is an important tool to maintain a plant's shape, size, and vigor with time. Improperly pruned plants are often disease prone and unsightly in the landscape. To avoid these issues, you must know how to prune, and which method is best suited to your plant. While it is difficult to provide a 'one-size-fits-all' guide for pruning, our staff will clarify any information and give specific instructions for your plants.

Tools For Pruning

- Handheld Bypass Pruner (required)
- Pruning Saw
- Bypass Lopper (2-handed)



Most pruning can be accomplished with a sharp Bypass Pruner, like a Felco #2. Avoid anvil pruners as they smash plant tissues rather than forming a clean cut. A Bypass Lopper is useful for larger branches, as is a sharp Pruning Saw. Tools should be kept sharp and well-oiled to prevent rust.

Note: When pruning Diseased plants, pruners should be sterilized in a 10% bleach or alcohol solution between cuts to prevent spreading fungal or bacterial infections.

Objective-Based Pruning

Your pruning method should be based on your desired aesthetic. **There is no pruning method that is non-damaging to a plant**, aside from removal of dead wood. Therefore, you must have a clear goal in mind prior to pruning and commit to the method. Pruning half a plant one year, then cutting the entire plant down the next does more harm than good.

Hedging and Shearing

Hedging and Shearing are easy pruning methods that make quick work of many plants. They are also a frequent cause for ugly, overgrown plants in the landscape. Hedging and Shearing are often used as a substitute for proper pruning and must be combined with a plant's preferred method to be successful. Hedging and Shearing is not covered here.



Pruning should always start with the removal of dead branches - these do not count against how much plant you can remove before damaging the shrub.

Best Time to Prune

For most deciduous shrubs, the best time to prune is during the dormant season after leaves have fallen (December-March). The structure of bare plants is easy to see and makes for easier pruning cuts. For spring-blooming shrubs (Forsythia, Lilac), pruning should be done just after flowers fade. This is because these plants produce flower buds in summer for the next year. Fall pruning will remove these buds and prevent blooms.

Pruning Methods:

There are four broad pruning methods for plants:

1. Thinning Cuts
2. Rejuvenation
3. Heading Cuts
4. Haircut

Each method caters to a specific growth habit and aesthetic, and each plant responds best to one of these methods. While some plants can tolerate multiple pruning styles, this handout only provides the preferred method for plants. If you want to learn more, our Knowledgebase and Horticulturists have a wealth of information to share.

These four methods are detailed on the backside, as well as plants generally suited to these styles.



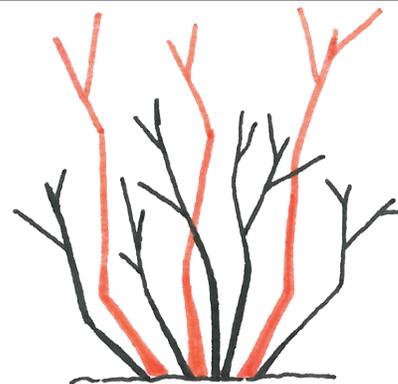
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Thinning Cuts Method

- Use annually or biennially
- Best for multi-stem plants that sucker, but applicable to many plants
- Removes old canes and allows new growth to sprout from base
- Reduces height, increases density and vigor

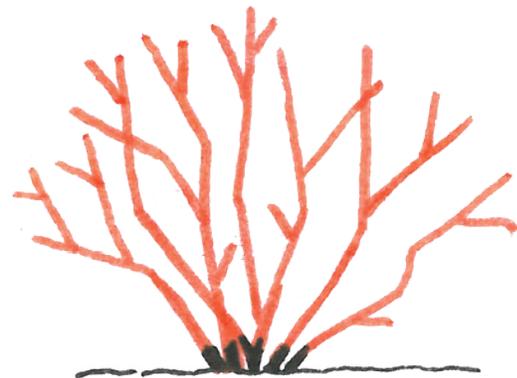
Examples: Chokeberry, Barberry, Clethra, Dogwood, Hazelnut, Forsythia, Oakleaf & Endless Summer Hydrangea, Winterberry, Rugosa Rose, Elderberry, Arrowwood Viburnum, Common Lilac



Rejuvenation Method

- Use every 3-5 years; shorter intervals can cause plant decline
- Best for vigorous multistem plants where young growth is attractive
- Drastic method, entire plant is cut down just above ground level
- Causes immense flush of healthy new growth
- **CAUTION:** This method is fatal to some plants (ex. Burningbush, Panicle Hydrangea)

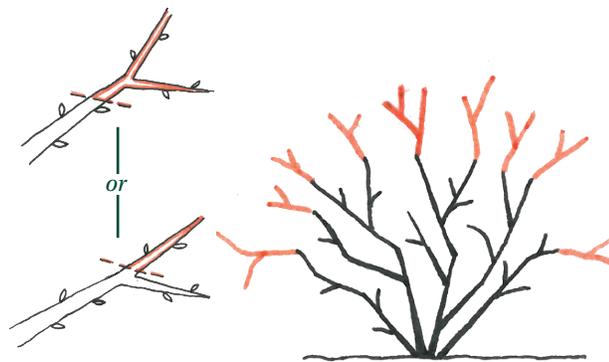
Examples: Honeysuckle, Dwarf Arctic Willow, Cutleaf Stephanandra, Smooth Hydrangea (Annually)



Heading Cuts Method

- Use annually or biennially
- Best for plants where a manicured, rounded shape is desired
- Cuts are made above buds or lateral branches, causing new growth to flush from below
- Less drastic than Thinning or Rejuvenation methods

Examples: Dappled Willow, Smokebush, Fothergilla, St. John's Wort, Panicle (Sun) Hydrangea, Rose of Sharon, Koreanspice Viburnum, Blackhaw Viburnum, Burningbush, Shrub (Knockout) Roses



Haircut Method

- Use every 3-5 years; shorter intervals can cause plant decline
- Best for established shrubs that need occasional attention
- Rehabilitates older plants that have been improperly pruned
- Combination of Heading and Thinning Cuts Methods

Examples: Creeping (Bridal Rice) Willow, Spiraeas, Potentilla/Quince, Meyer & Miss Kim Lilacs



Remove 1/2 to 2/3 plant height, then remove 1/3 oldest branches.

PLANTS ARE A COSTLY INVESTMENT

Improper pruning decreases curb appeal and often leads to plant mortality.

Pruning is damaging and invasive. Removing living tissue costs energy to your plant. Pruning too much and/or too frequently can cause a decline in plant health as nutrient reserves are depleted. Pruners must be sharp to do their job well.

Ask a professional, watch your fingers, and be careful!



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