

# Pruning with a Purpose



Pruning is an activity that strikes fear in the hearts of many gardeners. Whether you are a total novice or a seasoned gardener, having a *purpose* and a *plan* will give you confidence as you head to the garden with pruner or lopper in hand.

Pruning should not be thought of in terms of removing growth. It is helpful to think of pruning as stimulating new growth. The goal of proper pruning is to understand how and where you make the cuts to direct this new growth. Once you master this concept, pruning becomes natural.

## Pruning for Health

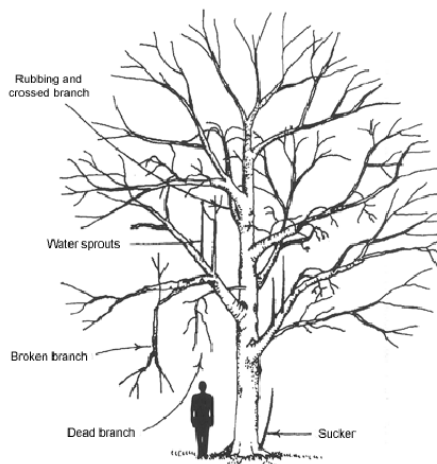
Prune dead, diseased, damaged limbs at any time of year. This includes branches that are in danger of falling during the next wind or ice storm.

Prune dense vegetation by making thinning cuts in the center of a shrub to open the plant's interior to sunlight and airflow, which can reduce diseases. Pruning may also extend the life of the plant and can create movement and visual interest in the garden.

Prune to reduce risk of injury in your garden by removing tripping and other injury hazards in walkways.

Prune for accessibility around hose hookups, electrical outlets and air conditioner units where access will be needed.

Prune to improve the overall health and beauty of a plant for a pleasing landscape.



## Pruning for Appearance

Although it is best to allow a plant to grow into its natural shape, you may prune to train or improve the plant's shape or size. The key to keeping a plant a certain size is pruning each year and not letting it become overgrown. Better yet, in the beginning, choose a variety of the plant to fit the desired space instead.

Skip the pruning shears. Shrubs are most attractive in their natural state. Shearing shrubs into boxes and balls is unnatural. Excessive shearing shortens the life of the plant and destroys the natural beauty of the plant. Shearing doesn't control size and, sheared shrubs will never fully flower as the constant removal of the stem also removes the flower buds. Remember, pruning stimulates growth so it will regrow in a matter of time. Instead, prune to direct the growth which helps to control size. Shearing shrubs should be reserved for formal landscapes.

## Pruning for Rejuvenation

Some shrubs can become so overgrown that thinning is not enough. Shrubs such as, Lilac, Forsythia, Barberry, Sweet Mock-Orange, Pyracantha Spirea, Viburnum, and Weigela can be cut back to about 6-inch stubs in early spring before new growth starts.

This brings vigorous re-growth, but blooms for the year will be lost if the shrub blooms on old wood. Rejuvenating cuts should never be tried with conifers or needle-leaved evergreens.

## Pruning for More Flowers and Fruit

Opening a tree or shrub up for better light penetration results in more flowers. Young, vigorous stems flower more profusely than old, woody stems. Thinning out branches from a fruit tree reduces the number of flowers and fruit, which will increase the mature size.

**When to Prune? Timing is important!**

**Plants that bloom on “old wood”**

Lilac, Forsythia, Azalea, Beautybush, Deutzia, Mahonia, Mock-Orange and Serviceberry are shrubs that flower in the spring on last year’s growth. These are generally spring blooming bushes. They must be pruned no later than four to six weeks after blooming to allow flower buds for the next year to set after pruning.

**Plants that bloom on “new wood”**

Rose of Sharon, Smoketree, summer blooming Spirea, Roses, Potentilla, Abelia, Barberry, Butterfly Bush and Crepe Myrtle may be pruned in late winter/early spring and will bloom on the new wood.

**What about Evergreens?**

Needle-leaved plants such as Arborvitae, Juniper and Yew are best pruned in early spring before new growth begins. Do **not** cut back into the dead zone. Make sure green foliage remains on the limb after making the cut. If not, a dead hole will appear.

Broad-leaved evergreens like Holly, Rhododendron and Azalea may be pruned to thin out growth or maintain shape in early spring after flowering.

**Pines and Spruces**

Prune pines as little as possible in late spring after new growth. Height and width can be controlled by pruning the candles (the current year’s new growth) back one-half to one-third. A word of caution: Avoid cutting back into an older limb as it will die.

Spruces are best when allowed to grow naturally. Prune as recommended for pines. If the plant is overgrown, consider replacing with an appropriate-sized variety.

**Deciduous Trees**

Deciduous trees are those that lose their leaves. The best time to prune them is when the tree is dormant, which is late winter or early spring when it is easier to see which

branches need pruning. Also, the rapid growth of spring enables the tree to seal the wounds caused by pruning, limiting the chances that disease-causing organisms will infect the tree.

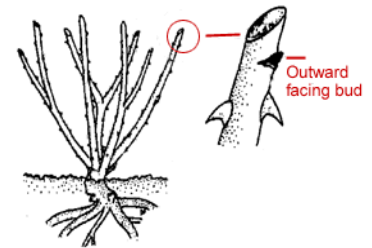
**Pruning Hydrangeas**

There are many popular varieties of hydrangeas: Oak Leaf, Macrophylla, Paniculata and Annabelle (Arborescens). Oakleaf and Macrophylla bloom on old wood. Paniculata and Annabelle bloom on new wood. Care should be taken in pruning hydrangeas so that blooms are not accidentally pruned off. Follow the guidelines for old or new wood flowering.

**Pruning Shrub Roses**

Prune Shrub Roses in the early spring before new leaves emerge as they bloom on new growth. Cut back to about 12 to 18 inches high. Branch structure is important. Remove crossing, old woody or inward growing canes to the ground. Select three to five outward facing canes and prune down to outward facing buds (see diagram below).

As new canes grow through the season, pruning encourages those remaining canes to grow outward so air and sunlight reach the center of the plant. Fewer canes gives the plant more energy to put into better flower production.



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