



Pruning Trees & Shrubs



Proper pruning will help keep your trees and shrubs healthy and within the size limits you desire. You should prune for three reasons: **to train and redirect growth, to maintain their health by removing damaged, dead, diseased or weak wood, and to increase the quality or quantity of fruit or flowers.**

For trees, first remove dead, diseased or crossing branches; this includes suckering growth and watersprouts. Next, prune for form. Make the largest cuts first, and the smallest ones last. **Never top a tree** or you will lose the leader, produce unbalanced growth, and **never remove more than 25 percent of the foliage limbs** in any one season. If it is necessary to make large pruning cuts on your trees, try to do so in the dormant season (late fall thru early spring). Dormant pruning will enable you to clearly examine the entire tree structure, disease and insects are less active therefore less likely to infect open pruning wounds at this time of year, and early season growth of the tree will heal quickly. However, at any time of year if a branch is dead, diseased or in a dangerous location, prune it as soon as you spot it. **To prune heavy tree limbs**, make your cuts in three stages. Make the first cut halfway thru the underside of the branch two feet from the trunk. This prevents the limb tearing off bark as the branch falls. Next, make the second cut on the top, just an inch or two outside the bottom cut, to remove the limb. The third cut to remove the branch stub should be flush with the branch collar (swollen area between the trunk and branch that accelerates the healing process).

Shrubs, if not thinned or cut back, will become overgrown and crowded. A healthy shrub will benefit by removing one third of its size each year. Spring blooming shrubs, such as Forsythia, bloom on last season's wood. They will set their buds in early summer that remain dormant until next spring. These shrubs should be pruned immediately after blooming. Summer and fall blooming shrubs are best pruned in early spring down to where new growth is being formed. A heavy pruning at this time will result in a more vigorous plant with denser growth and an abundance of flowers. **When pruning shrubs make selective cuts** by first removing damaged, dead, diseased or crossing branches, then remove long shoots that ruin the shape of the plant. Remember to thin the interior of the shrub by pruning one third of the oldest branches down to the ground to increase air and light penetration and rejuvenate growth. **Refrain from shearing** individual shrubs, unless you are deadheading or disbudding, because this will cause poor overall development and an unnatural growth habit. The practice of shearing is best used when maintaining a formal hedge or topiaries. If you choose to shear, be sure to shape the hedge so it is narrower at the top and wider at the bottom. This will allow sunlight to reach the bottom leaves.

Non-flowering, standard varieties of **evergreens** like Arborvitae, Holly and Juniper need little pruning maintenance. The best time to prune them is in late spring into early summer when the new growth is still soft. Prune Spruces and Pines that form "candle" growth at this time too, cutting the candles or branch tips in half. If you choose to shear evergreens into a formal shape or to form denser growth you will have to maintain the shearing each year.

In pruning trees and shrubs there are a few other tips to consider such as pruning cuts should be made at a 45-degree angle just above the bud or branch to which you are cutting back. Do not leave stubs that allow for disease and insects to invade the plant. Never prune back to bare, unproductive wood unless you intend for no new growth to form. Make sure your shears and saws are sharp and sterilized. You want a clean cut. Pruning sealants are generally not used unless there is an apparent disease or insect infestation that could invade the cut. **See the back of this flyer for more detailed pruning information.**

When to Prune Popular Shrubs:

Azalea/Rhododendron - in spring immediately after flowering

Berberis (Barberry) - in late winter/early spring when new growth starts thru mid-April*

Buddleia (Butterfly Bush) - in spring down to 6-12"; cut back ½ of new growth at beginning of June and again at the beginning of July to maintain a compact, dense shrub

Buxus (Boxwood) – in late spring prune new growth heavily; shape anytime as needed

Callicarpa (Beauty Berry) - in late winter/early spring cut back hard to rejuvenate

Caryopteris (Bluebeard) - cut to ground each spring similar to semi-woody perennials like Lavender and Russian Sage

Chamaecyparis (Goldthread Cypress) – in spring remove the leader and prune branches to maintain shape

Clethra (Summersweet) - occasional thinning needed in spring

Cornus (Redtwig Dogwood) - in early spring cut back hard or after flowering*

Cotinus (Smokebush) – in spring prune heavy to keep compact

Cotoneaster – little pruning needed; remove weak or damaged growth in late fall or early spring

Deutzia - in summer after flowering

Euonymus (Burning Bush) – cut back, up to ½ its height, in early spring before new growth starts

Forsythia - in spring immediately after flowering as much as ½ its height*

Fothergilla - thin occasionally by removing the weakest, oldest stems to the ground after flowering

Hibiscus (Rose of Sharon) - in late winter/early spring; the harder they are cut back, the better they flower.

Hydrangea – Mophead/Oakleaf/Mountain types prune for height in July, protect in winter; prune down to uppermost buds in spring. Panicle/Smooth varieties prune heavy when dormant down to 6-10" tall

Ilex (Holly) – evergreen types in late spring into early summer when the new growth is still soft at the tips. Winterberry or deciduous holly prune in late fall to late winter to harvest berries; remove up to ½ its height

Itea - immediately after flowering

Juniperus (Juniper) - in late spring into early summer when the new growth is still soft and light green

Ligustrum (Privet) - in late winter for hard pruning or after flowering; shear anytime during the growing season

Picea /Pinus (Spruce/Pine) – in late spring into early summer when “candle” growth is still soft; cutting the candles or branch tips in half

Pieris – in spring after flowering

Philadelphus (Mock Orange) - immediately after flowering*

Potentilla – in late winter/early spring cut to 10-12" to rejuvenate growth, otherwise little pruning is needed

Rosa (Rose) – Hybrid Teas, Floribundas, Grandifloras prune ½ their height in late fall, protect by mulching and/or wrapping in winter; in spring remove winter die-back and prune down to uppermost, outward facing buds. Climbers protect in winter, prune in spring to remove old or damaged canes then lightly prune the top growth down to uppermost buds being produced. Hardy Shrub types like ‘Knock Outs’ prefer heavy pruning down to 6" in spring each year to rejuvenate all new growth and flowers, remove thick old wood to the ground.

Rubus (Blackberry/Raspberry)-cut fruiting canes down to the ground after harvest; thin canes out in late winter

Salix (Willow) – in late winter prune heavy; prune again early summer to keep growth compact

Spiraea (Spirea) - immediately after flowering for spring blooming “bridal veil”, white flowering varieties; if overgrown or summer blooming, prune as needed in early spring*

Syringa (Lilac) - in late spring immediately after flowering*

Taxus (Yew) – in early spring before new growth starts; do any additional shaping by the end of June

Thuja (Arborvitae) - in late spring into early summer when the new growth is still soft; if shearing only remove 2-3" at a time.

Vaccinium (Blueberry)-in late winter/early spring prune out ¼ to ½ of the oldest, weakest stems

Viburnum - immediately after flowering as heavy or as light as needed*

Vitis (Grape)-in late winter/early spring before new growth begins

Weigela - remove winter dieback and thin out in spring; prune to reduce size immediately after flowering*

Yucca – little pruning is needed; flowering stalk can be removed at any time

* These shrubs that become overcrowded producing clumps of weak, suckering growth at their base benefit from **rejuvenation pruning**: removing 1/3 of the oldest stems down to the ground each dormant season for the next three years to produce new, strong growth and better blooming