

Year Round Gardening

Pruning Shrubs

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Late winter is a great time to assess the pruning needs in your garden.

Shrubs are a great addition to your garden. If they are well maintained they can add structure and interest all year long. In general, they are lower maintenance than herbaceous plants and can be long lived.

Proper pruning technique will keep your shrubs healthy, appealing, encourage more prolific blooms and manage shape and size.

Pruning for plant health

- Broken, damaged, diseased or branches that rub together should be removed whenever you see them. Cut them below the damaged area, discard the branches if they show signs of disease.

Pruning for Shape and blooms

- Branch by branch shaping: Cut back longer branches to the crotch or a bud, maintains the natural shape of the shrub, keeping it looking neat.
- Thinning: Remove about 1/3 of the branches each year back to the crotch of those branches, select larger branches for pruning. Promotes blooms and new growth, and controls woodiness. Maintains the natural shape of the shrub.
- Renewal pruning: For certain summer blooming shrubs (those that bloom later than June 15). These are shrubs that bloom only on new growth. The shrub is cut back to 8 to 12" from the ground, in later winter. Examples of shrubs that benefit from renewal are butterfly bush, blue mist spirea, Russian sage, and barberry. Not all shrubs will tolerate this annually, research your shrub before you apply this approach. An alternative to annual renewal is to complete the process over a three-year period.
- Rejuvenation: This is the most drastic of approaches usually reserved for seriously overgrown shrubs. The shrub is cut back almost to the ground. It can be a good alternative to rescue a well- established root system under an aged shrub.
- Spring blooming shrubs (those that bloom prior to June 15) can be pruned using any of the techniques listed here. Pruning should be done immediately after bloom.



Pruning Cuts

- Cuts should be made just above a bud or leaf or at the crotch of the branch.
- A 45° angle parallel to the stem bud or leaf is ideal.
- Use the correct size, sharp tool to make a clean cut.

Tools; choose your weapon wisely

- Draw cut or scissor action pruners work well for branches up to 1" in diameter.
- Lopping shears work well on branches up to about 2 ½" in diameter.
- Above 2 ½" diameter use a pruning saw to make the cuts..

Timing

- Late winter early spring
 - Summer blooming shrubs
 - Candidates for radical surgery (rejuvenation)
 - Junipers and arborvitae snip back new growth to an upward growing side branch to maintain natural shape. Do not cut back to wood.
- Mid spring to early summer
 - Spring bloomers right after bloom
 - Broadleaf evergreens (boxwood, holly, Oregon grape holly) and roses, mid-May
 - Mugo pines - Using the fingers, snap off one-third of the new growing tips while in the "candle" stage (in the spring when young needles are in a tight cluster).

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