



# PRUNING ORNAMENTAL TREES AND SHRUBS

## WHY PRUNING IS IMPORTANT

Pruning is one of the more important cultural practices in caring for trees and shrubs. It is the single most vital method for modifying the growth of the plant to adjust it to the conditions of the garden. Without regular pruning, shrubs may become overgrown and formless, evergreens around the foundation of the house may grow to obstruct the view from windows. One should also prune to maintain plant health by removing dead, diseased, or injured wood; to increase the quality of the plant. Roses become filled with dead stems and do not flower well and fruit trees become crowded with useless branches and bear poor fruit. In brief, sharp pruning shears used regularly and intelligently are probably the most valuable single tool the gardener possesses.

## THEORY OF PRUNING

In order to understand why we prune plants, it is important that we know something about the

growing habit of a plant. Basically, the plant is made up of two types of vegetative buds: terminal and axillary. The terminal buds are those found on the ends of all branches and twigs, while the axillary buds are found at the base of each leaf. During the season of most active growth, the terminal buds grow, adding length to the stems, and in turn preventing the growth and development of the axillary buds. By removing the terminal bud, you enable another bud or buds (axillary) immediately below the cut to grow.

The practical application of this fact is that by pinching or pruning out buds, you can make many plants behave or grow the way you want them to.

## TOOLS

Tools for pruning need not be expensive, however one should obtain a good-quality pruning tool which will keep a good cutting edge and which will be sturdy enough to handle the type of cuts you expect to make.

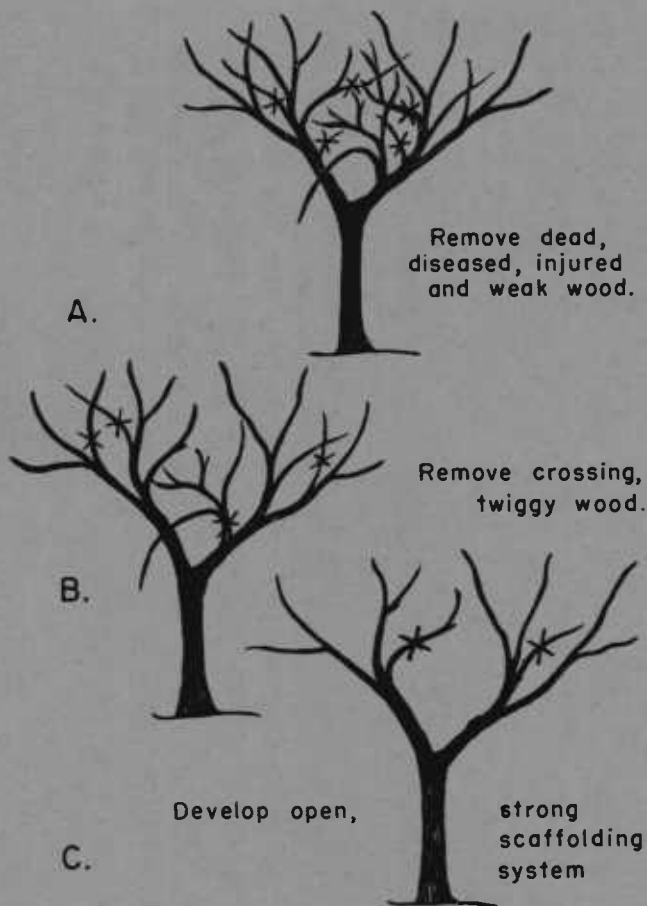
Hand clippers or shears will suffice if roses and small shrubs are to be pruned. Larger cuts may need to be made with long-handled loppers. For cutting large limbs from trees, a pruning saw will be a worthwhile investment.

*This publication was prepared by Les Fuchigami, professor of horticulture, and Ray McNeilan, Extension agent, Multnomah County, Oregon State University.*

Extension Circular 751 / Reprinted February 1983



OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION SERVICE



should be allowed to dry on the surface before attempting to cover with any dressing, otherwise they will not seal properly. Wounds or cuts smaller than 1½ inches will usually heal over satisfactorily without special treatment.

### AMOUNT OF PRUNING NEEDED

Almost all woody plants will benefit from pruning at some time or other. Some plants need only a very little pruning to remove weak or dead wood, or to direct the growth for good shape or form, while others should be pruned severely each year to keep them within bounds or to renew flowering wood. Light pruning to direct growth, to keep the plants within bounds, or to remove weak and dead wood, can be done at any time.

*Little pruning needed:* Slow-growing plants that have plenty of room for full development need no pruning other than that needed to maintain good shrub form or shape. Some shrubs, like lilacs, rhododendrons, and azaleas, produce new growth at the tips of canes and branches each year. For the most part these shrubs need only to have weak growth thinned out. Occasionally they may be cut back to a side branch or bud (headed back) to keep them more compact. Some examples of those needing only a minimum of pruning are:

Azalea	Dogwood	Junipers
Viburnum	Raphiolepis	Magnolia
Daphne	Redbud	Kalmia
Pieris	Oregon grape	Rhododendron
	Camellia	

Another group of plants can either be left alone to grow naturally or be pruned severely to hold down size. Without pruning they will grow to be large plants:

Aucuba	Meyer juniper
Glossy abelia	English laurel
Beautybush	Laurestinus
Winged euonymus	Photinia

*Severe pruning needed:* Some later-blooming plants will produce better flowers with longer stems if pruned severely. The entire plant should be cut down to within 6 to 12 inches of the ground each year. Some shrubs like spirea, forsythia, and beautybush send up new unbranched canes each year. These canes branch the second year but do not grow from the tip. Some new canes should be left each year, while the canes that are three years

### HOW TO PRUNE

For most gardeners, deciding where to cut is the hardest part of pruning. The following suggestions may help:

First—cut out dead, diseased, injured, weak, and twiggy growth.

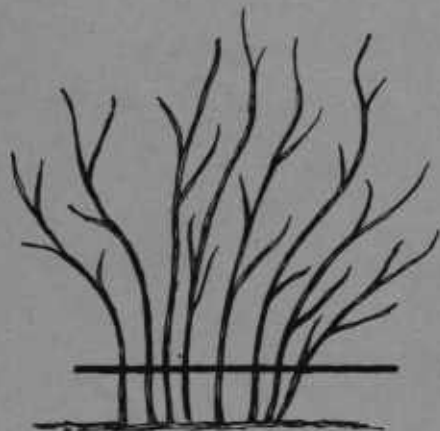
Next—remove shoots or twigs that are growing in the wrong direction, getting out of bounds, or crowding and crossing other limbs.

Finally—finish the job by thinning out where necessary for even spacing of branches, ease of spraying, and to maintain moderate growth and good annual flower production.

Most shrubs and trees look better if pruned so they can keep their natural shape. When making pruning cuts, cut back to a side shoot, branch, or bud. Make the cuts close enough that no stubs are left. On trees where limbs over 1½ inches in diameter are cut off, cover the cut with a wound dressing material. There are several commercial preparations available for this purpose. Large pruning cuts should be covered to prevent the entry of wood rotting fungi and insect infestations while the wound is healing. Pruning wounds

old or older should be removed. The following shrubs should be pruned severely:

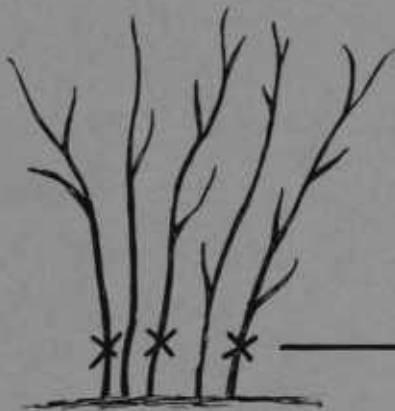
Rose of Sharon	Spirea
Butterfly bush	Forsythia
Hydrangea	Umbrella catalpa



Rejuvenation  
(Hydrangea)

Some old but healthy plants can be rejuvenated by cutting out old wood, either in one year or over a period of several years. Plants weakened by damage to roots or crowns may not respond to this treatment:

Lilac	Weigela
Mockorange	Spirea



Thinning

Another group of plants needs some attention every year to remove brushy, twiggy growth in the center part of the tree. Removal of this wood allows better light penetration, air circulation, and less chance of disease and insect pest infestation. Included are:

Hawthorne	Flowering plum
-----------	----------------

## WHEN TO PRUNE

Most pruning should be done either in the late dormant season (February or early March) or just after the plants bloom. Shade trees and summer blooming shrubs should be pruned in the dormant season before growth starts. Shrubs and trees that bloom early in the spring should be pruned soon after blooming.

*Early spring:* The blooms of summer flowering shrubs grow mostly on wood produced the same season. Most all late-blooming plants will produce better flowers or fruits if pruned severely each spring; however in the case of trees grown for decorative fruit, one should keep in mind that the heavier the pruning, the longer it will take for the tree to bear fruit. Some shrubs that should be pruned in early spring (February or early March) include:

Hydrangea	Butterfly bush	Spirea (Summer
Roses	Pomegranate	flowering)
	Coralberry	Shrubalthea

Flowering fruit trees or shrubs that bloom along the sides of the branches or on spurs of last year's wood should be pruned in early spring before growth starts by removing excess branches and water shoots or suckers. Pruning will provide more light for the remaining branches.

Cotoneaster	Flowering quince
Firethorn	Flowering crabapples
Holly	Hawthorne

Some shrubs are grown for their bright bark as well as for their flowers. They must be pruned severely in early spring to develop vigorous shoots with young showy bark. The young bark is more brilliant than the older wood:

Redtwig dogwood
Yellowtwig dogwood
Coralbark maple

*Late spring after blooming:* The blossoms of spring-flowering shrubs are formed on growth produced the previous year. Early blooming shrubs and trees should be pruned immediately after the blossoms have faded. Pruning will consist mainly of cutting out the older, branched or twiggy growth. These shrubs will grow new wood and

form fruit or flower buds before the end of the growing season:

Camellia	Lilac
Deutzia	Moonlight broom
Flowering almond	Snowball bush
Flowering cherry	Spirea (spring flowering)
Flowering peach	Weigela
Forsythia	Flowering plum

*Fall or late winter:* Some trees bleed profusely when pruned in the spring. While bleeding does not hurt the tree, it is viewed with alarm by most gardeners. Trees which bleed excessively can be pruned in late fall or during the winter before there is any sign of spring growth. They can also be pruned lightly during the summer.

Birches	Dogwood
Walnuts	Maples

Pruning stimulates growth. Wounds made in pruning heal rapidly if made in the early part of the growing season or in late winter.

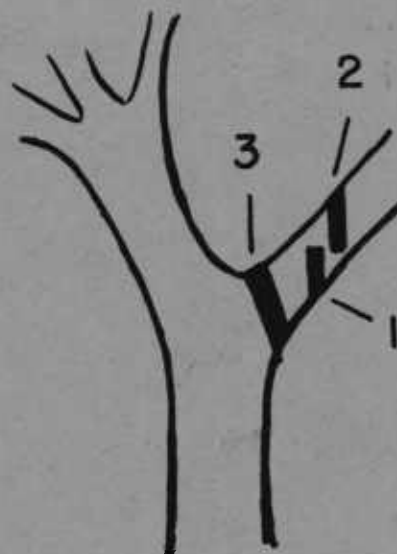
### PRUNING SHADE TREES

Most shade trees need little pruning other than to remove crowding branches, damaged limbs, or diseased parts. As with other types of pruning, make all cuts clean and flush with the remaining portion of the tree. Never leave a stub where decay may start or where it will make an unsightly blemish on the tree. Large limbs should be removed with care to avoid splitting and tearing bark away from the trunk. On limbs more than 4 inches in diameter make two cuts, one to eliminate excess weight and the second to remove the stub flush with the trunk.

Make an undercut at 1 first, then remove the limb at 2. Finish up with a straight cut at 3 to remove the stub. Cut as close to the trunk as possible so the wounded area will heal rapidly. Smaller branches can be removed carefully with a single cut. However, for any limbs where there is a possibility of bark tearing or breaking away it is safest to proceed as described above for large limbs.

Limbs can also be cut back to side branches, but the central trunk or growing tip should not be cut out unless the trees are to be kept sheared or cut to a definite shape, such as a hedge.

Some of the smaller trees and shrubby types lend themselves well to pruning. The Yews can



be cut back severely to keep them within bounds or they can be sheared to form hedges. The junipers can be cut back to side branches to limit their size. Arborvitae can be sheared for hedges or formed into special shapes such as globes. The pines can be cut back to side branches when this type of pruning is needed. They can also be made more compact by breaking off or cutting off about one-half of the length of the new growth or candles. This should be done when the needles on the new growth are about one-third grown.

### REMOVING SEED PODS, FRUITS, AND OLD FLOWERS

Some shrubs, such as lilacs, andromeda (Pieris), rhododendrons, and azaleas set seeds or pods following bloom. Removing the seed pods soon after bloom will help keep the plant vigorous and allow the plant to set a better crop of flower buds for the next season. Carefully snap out or prune away the spent flower heads to avoid damaging new buds.

Removing the seed heads or "hips" of roses soon after the petals fall will bring the everbearing sorts back into bloom faster and will give the other kinds stronger growth and better blooms the following year.

Most varieties of Heaths and Heather will make better plants if sheared heavily immediately after flowering. Shearing back to just below the blooms will stimulate new growth in the center of the plant and keep the plant compact.