



Basic Pruning

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Pruning means *selective* removal of parts of the plant to encourage good shape and good health. Selective pruning takes more time than the 'hair cuts' we see in many landscapes. It yields better results. All trees and shrubs, if given enough room to grow, develop specific forms. Selective pruning works with the natural shape of the plant rather than trying to give the plant some unnatural shape.

Prune With a Purpose:

- Prune to maintain good size and shape (within the limits of the plant's normal size).
- Prune to maintain the health and vigor of the plant.
- Improve flowering by:
 - Allowing light to penetrate and stimulate the development of flower buds.
 - Pruning at the correct time to avoid removing flower buds.
- Remove any undesirable growth (water sprouts, root suckers, crossing branches).

Best Time(s) to Prune:

- Deciduous trees: from late fall until very early spring.
- Deciduous shrubs that flower in spring: shortly after flowering (usually within two weeks after flowering ends).
- Deciduous shrubs that flower in late summer and fall: can be pruned any time between fall (after leaves have fallen off) and very early spring.
- Evergreens (both trees and shrubs): best pruned in spring around the time of new growth.

Pruning Tools:

- Use the right tool and use clean tools.
- Pick the tool that is right for the job.
- A hand pruner is a good choice if the cuts are mostly small ones.
- A long-handled lopper is good for slightly larger jobs. This tool is useful when you need to get to hard to reach branches or need to cut slightly larger branches.
- Pruning saws can be useful when larger branches and tree limbs are involved. These saws are very sharp and should be handled carefully.
- Pole pruners are a cutting blade mounted on a long pole. Used for trimming tree limbs that are hard to reach from the ground.
- To clean between cuts, dip the pruner blades in a 25% bleach solution (1 part bleach to 3 parts water) after each cut. To sanitize the pruner after the pruning job is complete, soak the blade in a 10% bleach solution.

Basic Cuts:

- Heading back: The length of a shoot is reduced by removing a portion of the stem back to a bud or a side shoot.
- Thinning out: A branch is removed entirely (either to the ground or back to the main limb from which it originated.)

Making Good Cuts.

Large diameter branches: do NOT cut flush. Look for a thickened or swollen area where the branch connects to the trunk or another main limb. This is the collar and it is the area most adapted to healing. Prune so that the collar, or at least part of it, remains after the cut is made.

Small branches: Make the cut above a bud as this is the next point of growth. Make the majority of cuts above outward facing buds. The pruning cut should be made fairly close to the bud. Do not leave a stub as this tissue will not produce new growth.

Pruning sealants are no longer recommended, except when oak trees must be pruned in the growing season. Certain beetles are attracted to fresh cuts and these beetles can carry oak wilt disease. A sealant will keep them away from the fresh cuts.

Pruning newly planted deciduous trees.

- In the early life of a tree, pruning can provide good form. Pruning to develop structure can begin at the time the tree is planted. Pruning can be used to remove damaged branches, branches that may cross one another in the future and branches that are growing close to one another on the trunk and which may impede each other's growth as they increase in girth. Moderate selective pruning can be beneficial to the tree without greatly slowing the rooting.
- Never remove the leader (the growing point) of the tree.
- Avoid limbing-up the lower branches of the tree.
- Try to retain strong limbs and remove weak ones. The branch angles can be a guide. The branch angle is the angle formed between a limb and the trunk or between two limbs. When the angle is wide, it tends to be stronger. Narrow angles tend to be weak.

Pruning established trees.

Older established trees often do not need much pruning, especially if they received proper pruning when young. Pruning of established trees consists of correcting problems such as crossing branches, root suckers and water sprouts.

Pruning deciduous shrubs. Good pruning is often a combination of thinning out and heading back cuts. The size and number of main stems will generally determine the correct method.

Renewal pruning:

- Used on shrubs that have several medium to large stems arising from the ground.
- Makes use of thinning out cuts.
- Older, taller branches are removed completely to the ground.
- Remove about one third of these older branches each year.
- Complete removal of these branches allows for better air circulation and better light penetration.
- Because the older branches are usually the tallest, height is controlled naturally.

Heading back:

- Used for shrubs with a single trunk or few trunks.
- Only heading back cuts are used. Old or unwanted wood is removed back to a limb that is part of the main framework of the shrub.
- Helps to reduce the size of the shrub, both vertically and horizontally, while maintaining the natural shape. It also allows for good air circulation and light penetration. Selective pruning comes into place here. Some branches may be cut back half way, some one third, etc.

Rejuvenation (renovation):

- Used for multi-stemmed shrubs that have numerous small to medium sized stems.
- Uses nearly complete removal of all of the stems.
- Stems are cut back to 4 to 6 inches tall, early in the season, around March.
- Does not need to be done every year.

Pruning evergreens. This discussion of pruning evergreens refers only to those evergreens that have not previously been sheared. Evergreens that have been sheared, should continue to be sheared. All evergreens have an area referred to as the 'dead zone', an area in the interior of the evergreen that has no buds. Because there are no buds present, there will be no re-growth in this area if pruning occurs here. Pruning into the dead zone will leave a permanent open area or hole. Most evergreens will be pruned around the time that new growth emerges.

Junipers: Junipers have branches that diverge and form V shaped angles. It is at these angles that the cuts will be made. Look at the structure of the juniper. If it is desirable to encourage the plant to grow wider, remove the more vertical part of the angle. Remove the horizontal portion of the angle to encourage more upright growth. This type of pruning is done about the time that new growth occurs (usually early May).

Yews: Yews that have been pruned (not sheared) regularly through their life time, may need very little to keep them in shape. Simply remove some of the new shoots as they appear in late spring to keep the plant well shaped. These new shoots are soft and may be removed by hand or with a hand pruner.

If a yew has not had proper pruning every year and has grown larger than desired, heavier pruning will be needed. Remove stems back to wood that is 2 years old by cutting at branch angles. This will remove larger amounts of wood and provide some size reduction. It also allows light into the shrub to stimulate development of new buds. This type of pruning will be done a little before new growth emerges.

Neglected yews will need even more severe pruning to get them in shape. This process may take 2-3 years to complete. Be sure to look carefully for the presence of buds before making any cuts. In the first year (again before new growth begins), remove about one third of the bulk of the plant. Prune selectively to minimize the unattractiveness of the shrub. Repeat this pruning for a second year and a third year if needed.

Pines and spruces. Pines and spruces need little pruning. Spruces tend to keep that neat pyramid shape throughout their entire lives. Pines don't. As pines age, they open up and take on picturesque shapes. This is normal and to be expected. Pruning on pines and spruces is generally limited to removal of dead or damaged branches.