

Pruning

When determining when to prune your plants, it's important to recognize that some plants have different pruning procedures than others. For example, plants like azaleas, rhododendrons, and lilacs should be pruned right after they finish blooming. Other plants should only be pruned in fall after the growing season has finished. This guide will help you know when and how to prune various shrubs, evergreens, and perennials.

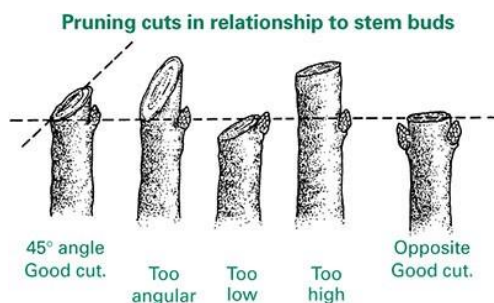
Spring Flowering Shrubs

The first group of shrubs to worry about are the spring flowering shrubs. This group includes forsythias, azaleas, rhododendrons, bridal wreath spirea, lilacs, viburnums, and weigelas. These shrubs all bloom on one-year-old wood. The flower buds on these shrubs develop from mid-summer until fall so pruning in fall and winter can lead to the loss of flowering wood. These shrubs can be rejuvenated or thinned in early spring before growth starts (you may lose some blooms) or right after they bloom to maximize the next year's blooms. You can also deadhead spent blooms on these plants to preserve the energy they would otherwise spend making seeds that are unattractive.

Summer Flowering Shrubs

The next group of flowering shrubs are those that flower in the summer. This group includes coralberry, mockorange, potentilla, *spirea bumalda*, *spirea japonica*, annabelle hydrangea, and snowberry. These shrubs all bloom on new wood that grew earlier in the growing season. They can be pruned to rejuvenate or thin them in early spring before growth starts. Removing older canes on these shrubs will result in better flowering throughout the shrub due to more sunlight reaching the plant. Routine pruning along the base can also encourage new shoots, which can be helpful to receive more vibrant and colorful shoots in plants like Red-Twig Dogwood which is known for its red colored shoots.

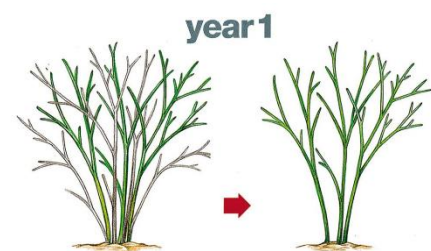
Flowering Shrub Pruning Methods



- **Branch by Branch Shaping** – shorten excessively long branches by pruning them one by one. Leave branches at varying lengths and avoid a uniform edge to prevent a rounded ball shape. The branches

of the shrubs should be cut at branch unions or just above the bud. This will allow your shrub to have a more natural shape, but will not encourage much new growth for maximizing blooms.

- **Shearing to Shape** – A pruning method that is often used due to it being quick and easy, however this results in shrubs losing their natural shape. Instead, shrubs will become a round ball or other desired shape. This method is also a problem because it will not encourage new growth at the base which is necessary for promoting flowering. This method also causes the inside of the plant to be shaded out by bushy exterior made up of thick outer foliage. This outer foliage will be prone to browning and burning from the wind and cold. Eventually these shrubs will become very woody and will need to be replaced.
- **Thinning** – A method for encouraging shrub flowering. The main goal of thinning is to remove one-third of the oldest wood to the ground every



year. Pruning out these older branches will stimulate new growth at the base of the shrub and will lead to better flowering. This method is easiest when shrubs are leafless in early spring, but can also be done in summer. A problem with this method is that it is time consuming and does not work well with twiggy, multi-stemmed shrubs.

- **Rejuvenation Pruning** – A final method for flowering shrubs is rejuvenation pruning. For this method of pruning a shrub is cut entirely to the ground in early spring before growth starts. This allows the shrub to regrow from the roots leading to a compact shrub that has the maximum bloom. This method is quick and easy, and should be followed by thinning the new canes for several years. This is typically done no more than every 3-5 years after

shrubs start to look gangly and woody. It is also important to know that spring flowering shrubs will not bloom the year of rejuvenation pruning, extremely overgrown shrubs or those that are in a bed with weed barrier and rock may not respond well, shrubs with lots of dead branches won't respond well, this method doesn't work on tree structured shrubs, and that this method cannot be used on grafted lilacs.

Evergreen Pruning

Each type of evergreen has different methods and recommendations to follow if you want to have the best appearance for your shrub.

- **Pines:** new growth occurs once a year from terminal buds. If you want to keep a densely branched, compact form you should remove approximately 1/2 to 2/3 of the elongated terminal buds (also known as candles). You should not cut these branches back to older growth because pines only produce new growth at the tips of branches and will not produce new growth from older portions of the stem.
- **Spruce, fir, and Douglas-fir:** new growth occurs once a year from terminal buds. To maintain the natural shape of these trees you should cut the tip of the branch back to a lateral bud. In early summer 2/3 of an unbranched tip can be removed to keep the tree fuller.
- **Hemlocks, arborvitae, and yews:** These evergreens have dormant buds farther down the stem. This means that they can be sheared in late spring or early summer after new growth has expanded. They can also be pruned in spring before new growth has expanded because new growth will hide pruning cuts. Another option with these evergreens is to prune individual branches back to a bud or branch to encourage a compact habit. If they are used in a hedge the base should be wider than the top to ensure enough light reaches the bottom of the hedge.
- **Junipers and False Cypress:** Junipers and false cypress require little pruning. Their scale and awl-like foliage can be tip pruned in the summer. You can also selectively prune branches back to a side branch so it is hidden under foliage. Junipers and false cypress should not be sheared or cut back to non-leafy areas because it can take years for the plant to conceal these cuts. They also should not be pruned after August because the new growth would not have time to harden off before winter.

What perennials should I prune?

Many people have probably heard that perennials should be cut back in the fall. However, there is a bit more to determining when to cut back perennials.

- **Perennials providing winter interest** – During winter some taller perennials can provide winter interest like those with seedpods or grasses. These perennials should not be cut back until spring because they can give you something interesting to look at in your winter landscape. Some examples of these perennials are Siberian Iris, Joe Pye weed, 'Autumn Joy' sedum, false indigo, feather reed grass, switch grass, and zebra grass.
- **Perennials providing food for birds** – Some perennials can also be left standing because their seeds provide food for birds. Examples of these perennials are coneflowers and Black-eyed Susan.
- **Perennials needing protection** – Perennials that are marginally hardy should be left standing because this allows the tops to collect snow for insulation and moisture.
- **Low growing evergreen or semi-evergreen perennials** - Hardy geraniums, coral bells, hellebores, dianthus, and creeping phlox are all low growing perennials that don't need to be cut back and can be cleaned up in spring.
- **Perennials to cut back** – plants that have disease or pest problems can be cut back to reduce the chances of infection the following year. Any stems and leaves that are diseased should be destroyed and not composted because they can allow the disease to spread and re-infect plants. Hostas should be cut back and have their leaves removed as soon as they are killed by frost because they can harbor slugs. You can also cut back any plants that don't have any winter interest or provide protection.

How to cut back perennials

When cutting back perennials you should leave two inches above the ground to mark its location. This way you won't accidentally dig late emerging perennials like butterfly weed and rose mallow (hibiscus). Unless the plants are diseased you should wait until several hard frosts have killed the tops.