

WHY PRUNE SHRUBS?

Shrubs are woody plants with several stems originating at or near the ground. Most shrubs have latent buds at their base and along their branches; new shoots from the base replace weak and dying branches and in effect keep a shrub young. Shrubs differ in height, spread, vigor and flowering characteristics, which each influence pruning techniques. Shrubs whose growth must be contained should be on a regular pruning program before they reach the size desired. Without pruning, shrubs will thin and deteriorate over the years. Dead and crowded growth will build up, reducing flowering and encouraging disease.

REASONS TO PRUNE

- ◆ To maintain plant vigor
- ◆ To remove damaged, dead, diseased and crossing stems (this should be attended to as soon as noticed)
- ◆ To improve flower/fruit production
- ◆ To restore or rejuvenate
- ◆ To beautify the landscape
- ◆ To maintain a natural shape for the species
- ◆ To control size (If you are constantly pruning to control size, then this may be a sign that the wrong plant was selected.)

PRUNING TIMETABLE FOR DECIDUOUS SHRUBS

Can't remember if you're to prune your flowering shrubs before or after they bloom? Use these lists for easy reference.

Early Spring (before flowering)
 Abelia x grandiflora (glossy abelia)
 Buddleia davidii (butterfly bush)
 Callicarpa spp. (beautyberry)
 Caryopteris x clandonensis (bluebeard)
 Hibiscus spp. (hibiscus)
 Hydrangea spp. (most hydrangea)
 Hypericum spp. (St. John's wort)

Potentilla fruticosa (cinquefoil)
 Rhus spp. (sumac)
 Spiraea spp. (summer-blooming spirea)
 Vitex spp. (chaste tree)

Immediately after flowering

Berberis spp. (barberry)
 Buddleia alternifolia (fountain buddleia)
 Chaenomeles spp. (flowering quince)
 Clethra spp. (summersweet)
 Cotinus spp. (smokebush)
 Cotoneaster spp. (cotoneaster)
 Daphne spp. (daphne)
 Deutzia spp. (deutzia)
 Euonymus spp. (euonymus)
 Forsythia spp. (forsythia)
 Kerria japonica (Japanese kerria)
 Kalmia latifolia (mountain laurel)
 Kolkwitzia amabilis (beautybush)
 Ligustrum spp. (privet)
 Lonicera spp. (shrubby honeysuckle)
 Philadelphus spp. (mock orange)
 Pieris spp. (pieris)
 Pyracantha spp. (pyracantha)
 Rhododendron spp. (rhododendron
 and azalea)
 Spiraea spp. (spring-blooming spirea)
 Syringa spp. (lilac)
 Viburnum spp. (viburnum)
 Weigela spp. (weigela)

WHEN SHOULD YOU PRUNE?

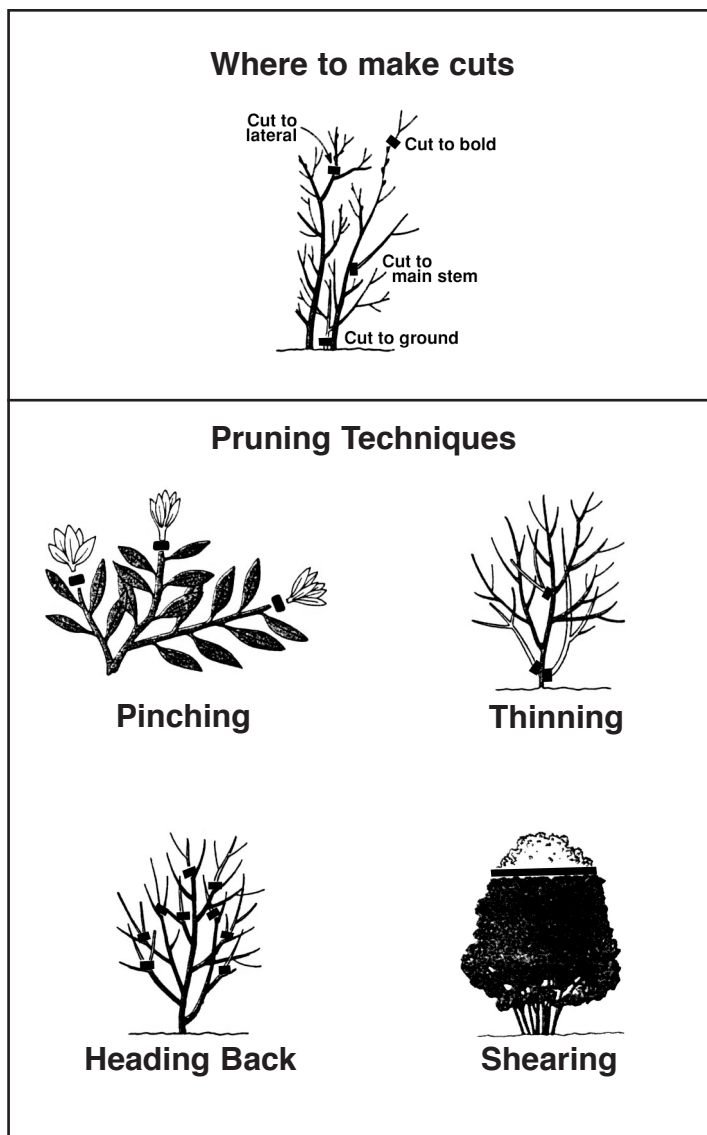
- ◆ Formative pruning for a neglected and overgrown shrub (hard pruning) is best carried out while the shrub is dormant (winter through very early spring). The disadvantage of losing a season's floral display is offset by the vigorous new growth of the plant.
- ◆ The age of the shoot on which flowering occurs is critical. If you prune a shrub correctly but at the wrong time of year, you may remove all the wood that would have flowered in the following season.

- ◆ When shrubs flower on new wood, prune in early spring. This will direct extra energy into the remaining buds, so that fewer but larger flowers are produced. On shrubs that flower on the previous year's wood, prune directly after flowering. This will promote the growth of strong flowering shoots for the following year.

Refer to the Pruning Timetable for the pruning requirements for deciduous shrubs.

PRUNING TECHNIQUES

- ◆ As many shrubs mature, shaded lower branches weaken, lose leaves and become unattractive. The solution is not to cut the low branches partially or completely off, but to prune the shrub so light can enter it. If plants are thinned in time, existing branches and new ones will usually be stimulated enough to keep the shrub full to the ground.
- ◆ Fast growing shrubs need regular pruning to keep them attractive and contained. You can maintain the natural shape by thinning and removing a few older stems every year and cutting others back to a bud or lateral to control the direction of future growth.
- ◆ Shrubs with buds that grow opposite one another should be cut squarely across the stem. Stems with an alternate arrangement of buds or shoots should be cut at an angle so the bud is pointing outside the shrub. This prevents cross branching.



The figures above refer to ways that you can prune shrubs. The stubs indicate what was pruned out. (Illustrations taken from Pruning Techniques.)

References

- Brickell, Christopher and David Joyce. The American Horticultural Society: Pruning and Training. DK Publishing, Inc. 1996.
- Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Pruning Techniques. Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1991.
- Harris, Richard W. Arboriculture: Integrated Management of Landscape Trees, Shrubs, and Vines. Prentice Hall, 1992.