

Pruning Part 1

The topic of pruning causes more questions than most other garden topics put together. Pruning is a systematic part of plant maintenance involving the selective removal of parts of a plant, such as branches, buds, or roots. Flower buds, fruits and seed pods may also be pruned. Many home gardeners feel they ought to prune, but are not sure why or how.

Why should I prune? Do I have to prune? No you don't actually have to, but it will improve the health of your plant, improve the appearance of plants, improve the quality and quantity of flowers and fruit, maintain and improve plant health, including foliage, stems and branches, and restrict growth and size. The least mentioned reason for pruning is safety, large tree branches can and do fall endangering the people or houses below them.

Trees and shrubs in the wild aren't pruned; I'll just leave everything to grow. Well Mother Nature does prune, branches break in wind and other bad weather, animals such as rabbits and deer prune plants by eating them. They don't prune carefully and often leave ragged cuts that are entry points for disease and don't have aesthetic appeal.

Almost all types of plants are pruned annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees are all pruned. We may not think that deadheading marigolds, or removing dead or dying leaves on perennials as pruning but it is, so you already do some pruning.

When do I do it? Most annuals and perennials do not have extensive pruning needs, deadheading spent flowers, and cutting back stems that have grown too long or tall along with cutting down old or dying foliage in the fall is all that is usually necessary.

Corrective pruning of all plants because of injury or dead tissue, should be done as soon as the problem is noticed. Stray or broken branches can be trimmed back any time. If a shrub is too big, you don't need to worry about cutting off whole branches at a particular time of year as you wanted to reduce the overall size anyway. If you do make a mistake, plants are very forgiving. You may miss a season of flowers but the plant will recover for the next year.

Remove branches that are dead, diseased, or damaged. Try to remove the pruned material out through the crown, do not drag the material through the branches. Dragging diseased branches through the crown can spread the disease through the tree.

When shaping shrubs think of their natural growth habit and remember that each shrub is inherently programmed for a certain size, profile, and branching pattern. Make cuts that support these features and preserve the essential character of the plant. Lollipop shapes look unattractive.

In fact, pruning stimulates growth. When you cut back a shoot, you cause buds on the remaining part of the branch to break into growth. Note, however, that a characteristic known as apical dominance causes the topmost buds to grow the fastest and the longest. This is useful if, for example, there is a hole in a tree, shrub or hedge that you want to fill. By pruning surrounding branches back to a bud pointing toward the hole, you can encourage growth into the empty area.

Shrub pruning is a common cause of confusion and worry to many gardeners. Spring blooming shrubs develop their flower buds during the summer and fall of the previous year. This is what is meant by "blooming on old wood." The branches or twigs the flowers are on grew last year. Pay attention to when your shrubs flower. If they flower before the start of summer June 21, they are spring flowering. These shrubs have a resting period of about three to six weeks before they begin preparing flower buds for next year's bloom. They need to be pruned shortly after the flowers die back, if you wait longer than 6 weeks you are removing next year's flowers.

Shrubs that bloom in summer and fall 'bloom on new wood', that is branches and twigs that grew this year. These shrubs can be pruned in the early spring before new growth starts.

Because pruning stimulates new growth do not prune any flowering shrub in late summer or autumn. This might stimulate new growth which is susceptible to damage by cold temperatures.

A lot of pruning frustration for home gardeners can be avoided by careful selection of the trees and shrubs for your garden. All plants grow; a shrub that will grow 2 metres wide and 3 metres tall should not be planted next to your front door, or under the garage overhang. They may be small and 'cute' when young but just like a St Bernard puppy, they grow far faster than you think.

It doesn't matter if you planted the problem shrub or tree or it was already there it doesn't mean it has to stay forever. If you have to prune a shrub multiple times during the growing season, it is in the wrong place. Either move it or get rid of it. Then plant a more carefully selected shrub in its place.

Tools to use include a good quality hand pruner; bypass pruners are better for cutting live wood, anvil pruners tend to squash the branches or stems and are best used on dead wood. Loppers are like a long handled bypass pruner used for larger branches and those higher up. A pruning saw works well on old wood in confined spaces. Hedge shears if needed are meant for trimming hedges not shrubs or trees. Chain saws are not pruning tools.

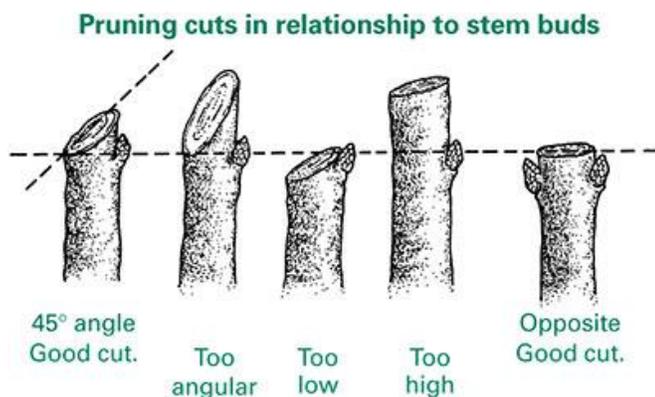
Use good quality, sharp and clean tools. Clean your tools after pruning each plant to prevent spreading disease. A solution of one part chlorine bleach or rubbing alcohol with ten parts water is quite effective.

If you can't reach a branch while standing on a step ladder, you should hire a professional.

A home gardener should have a good pruning book, with how to information for a wide range of plants. The Pruning Book by Lee Reich is an excellent resource. Pruning and Training by Christopher Brickell and David Joyce provides how to prune guidelines for many plants, trees and shrubs.

Cornell University, New York state has an excellent publication called An Illustrated Guide To Pruning Ornamental Trees And Shrubs, this guide has lots of diagrams and detailed instructions.

To download it go to <http://www.hort.cornell.edu/uhi/outreach/index.htm> the link is at the bottom of the page.



If you have garden questions please contact us at streetvillehort@hotmail.com, and check out our website at www.streetvillehort.ca

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