

Caring For Your Landscape: Pruning

Now that your new trees, shrubs, and flowers are in the ground, you can sit back and enjoy your investment. With the right maintenance at the right times, keeping your plants looking healthy and beautiful can be easy. Use these pruning tips to maintain the health and vigor of your plants and maximize their natural beauty.

Evergreen Shrubs

Except for pines, evergreens can be pruned in spring before new growth begins or during a mid-summer semi-dormant period. Most evergreens have a strong, central branch leader. **The leader** requires little maintenance, but you can prune this branch to control height, density, and shape.

Pine: With pines, you'll want to work with the plant's natural growth, which occurs in the spring. Prune as new growth emerges by pinching off up to half of each candle as it expands. Be careful not to prune back into the woody stem, as this will inhibit future growth. Shearing is not recommended for pines.

Spruce & Fir: To control the shape of your spruce or fir, prune new growth in the spring or shear once new growth has emerged. You can cut back a lateral branch or dormant bud at any time to keep the size of a branch in check. If you lose your leader, you'll need to train another one, and if two leaders develop, you'll want to remove the weaker branch.

Yews & Hemlocks: To maintain their size and shape, these shrubs should be pruned in late winter or early spring before new growth, then again in early summer. Shearing can be done after new growth has emerged and throughout the growing season. Stop pruning at the end of August to prevent late-season growth and reduce the risk of winter injury.

Boxwoods & Hollies

These woody ornamental plants should be pruned in late winter or early spring, before dormancy has broken but when the temperature is above freezing. Trimming or thinning out your hollies and boxwoods will help maintain a crisp, neat appearance and keep new growth under control. Start from the inside and work outward, cutting branches just above new buds or all the way back to the main branch. Make sure to completely remove any damaged or dying branches. If growth is vigorous, you'll need to trim again in June or July when the new growth has hardened. On your holly bushes, you'll want to maintain an even shape, so avoid cutting lower branches shorter than those above. Both boxwoods and hollies are likely to withstand pruning all the way to the ground during dormancy, but severe pruning is best done gradually over several seasons.

Flowering Shrubs

Lucky you! Most flowering shrubs only need to be pruned once a year – if that! It's better for you and your plants to keep pruning to a minimum. When you do get the pruners out, it's best to do so after the flowers have bloomed. Since **spring bloomers** put out next year's buds at the end of the season, pruning in fall or winter will lead you to remove unopened buds. Once flowering has taken place, thin branches selectively for an ideal shape. **Summer flowering shrubs** bloom on the current year's growth, so prune in late winter to encourage new growth and more flowers the next season. When it comes to **trimming** the occasional stray shoot or branch, don't be shy. You won't hurt the plant by removing a branch or two.

A note on **Hydrangeas:** These are special. Find out whether your hydrangeas bloom on new wood or old wood. Pruning of old-wood bloomers should be done immediately after flowering. With new-wood bloomers, wait until late winter to cut them back.

Deciduous Shrubs

When it comes to deciduous shrubs, thinning out new growth beats shearing every time. You can maintain ideal height and width for years by thinning out with hand pruners. The best time for pruning deciduous shrubs is while plants are dormant, before new growth begins. Starting with the oldest and tallest stems, cut back branches where they attach to the main stem or another branch, or back to a bud. To rejuvenate plants that have grown out of control, cut off the oldest branches, leaving only young stems. Then use the thinning-out method to cut back new shoots that emerge.

Perennial Flowers

Pruning perennials can be complex but also very beneficial. **Spring-flowering perennials** can be cut back to one-half the size of the plant after flowering to promote fresh growth and improve their appearance. **Summer-flowering perennials** require more research, as some should be pruned before flowering, others after. Some can even be pruned to control or stagger bloom time.

To get the best results when pruning your perennials, invest in by-pass pruners, hedge shears, and hand pruners. You'll also be well-served to explore several types of pruning, including deadheading, cutting back, pinching, disbudding, and thinning.

How To Prune Flowering Shrubs



A clean cut with loppers or hand pruners (angled at a 45 degree angle) that should be performed after flowering occurs.

Pruning Tools



Anvil Pruners



Hand Pruners



Loppers



Hedge Clippers

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