

Pruning and Maintenance



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SHRUBS

Correct, regular pruning is one of the most important things you can give your shrubs. However, unless the correct methods are followed, you may instead hasten their decline. **There are four basic methods for pruning shrubs: renewal pruning, rejuvenative pruning, heading or thinning and the “haircut” method.** All four may be used on some types of shrubs, but usually only one or a few types are applicable. The type of pruning required by a specific shrub is listed in Table 1. A special form of pruning, shearing or hedging will be discussed in the last section.

RENEWAL PRUNING

Many people believe pruning shrubs involves shearing them. While this may be applicable to certain types of shrubs and situations, a vast majority of shrubs do not respond well to shearing. Shearing also destroys the plant's natural form and they are more susceptible to snow and ice damage. Instead, most often renewal pruning should be used.

Most leafy (deciduous) shrubs benefit from regular renewal pruning. Upon examination, you will notice that most shrubs consist of many stems or canes arising from the ground. *Renewal*

pruning involves the selective removal of the largest, heaviest canes at the ground line. (See Figure 1 below) A pruning saw or scissor-type lopper is the best tool for renewal pruning.

Renewal Pruning Benefits

- Plant's natural form maintained
- Plant's height reduced
- New growth initiated below each cut resulting in a denser plant
- Old and diseased wood removed resulting in a vigorous, healthier plant

The best time to prune most shrubs is when they are dormant. Just prior to bud break in March or April is the best time, although it can be done anytime during the dormant season (late fall to early spring). When pruned at the proper time, the cuts readily seal over and new growth quickly arises. If done



Remove the largest, heaviest canes at the groundline. After removing the old canes, the renewal pruned shrub is more compact and healthier.

later, there is less of a response to renewal pruning. Do not prune in late summer or early fall because the new growth will not fully harden off before winter.

How often do you need to renewal prune shrubs?

Normally, over the life of the shrubs, you should only have to remove a few canes per year.

The benefits can be easily observed on redbud dogwood. The younger wood of redbud dogwood is more colorful, while the older, heavier canes are more woody and less colorful. Simply remove the largest diameter canes with the least color at the ground line, leaving behind the younger, more colorful stems. The following season more new, bright red stems will be produced giving the plant more visual impact.

Renewal pruning is very useful on most leafy (deciduous) shrubs. Lilacs, honeysuckles and shrubby dogwoods respond very quickly to renewal pruning. However, it does not work well for all shrubs. Burningbush should never be renewal pruned, while other large-scale, specimen shrubs such as corneliancherry dogwood and common witchhazel may never require it. Please consult Table 1 for the shrubs which benefit from renewal pruning.

One exception to the dormant season timing is early spring blooming shrubs such as forsythia. You should renewal prune them after enjoying the flowers. These exceptions are designated by an * in Table 1.

REJUVENATIVE PRUNING

For the bold and unafraid, many of the same benefits from renewal pruning can be had more swiftly. While renewal pruning is a gradual process of thinning older wood from shrubs over a period of time, *rejuvenative pruning is a one-shot approach.* You remove every stem and branch just above the ground all at once. (See Figure 2 below)

Rejuvenative pruning is best done just prior to bud break in March or early April, when the plant has the most stored energy. This method works extremely well on honeysuckle, lilacs and a few others. It also should be remembered that many plants resent this treatment and you should consult Table 1 for specific applications. If you prune in summer, especially on a badly stressed shrub of an inappropriate species, this one-shot approach can kill.

Annabelle, Snowhill and White Dome hydrangea are unique among shrubs in that they benefit from annual rejuvenative pruning. They bloom only on new wood and, unless annually pruned back, they become floppy from the large flowers, particularly Annabelle. It is important to remember that peegee hydrangea is not pruned this way and can be seriously damaged if done so. Please consult Table 1 for the proper pruning for your hydrangea.

HEADING AND THINNING CUTS

Heading and thinning cuts are two less dramatic types of pruning. They are useful for detail shaping or adding density to plants. Both are useful and produce slightly different results.

Heading cuts are made just above a bud. (See Figure 3) They result in a shoot developing from the bud and often from the lower buds as well. When you make a heading cut, leave just enough of a stub to keep the bud or buds below from drying out. Where just one bud is present a slightly slanted cut is desirable. However, if too large a stub is left, rot may be



HEADING CUTS



Make the cut just above a side branch which will force new growth that way.

THINNING CUTS



Make the cut just above the bud. This will result in a shoot developing in spring.

Figure 3

potentillas should on be trimmed back to 1/2 or 2/3rds their size. Next, selectively remove the oldest, heaviest twigs completely to the ground, similar to renewal pruning. (See Figure 4 at the bottom of the page) Normally, this involves removing 2-4 twigs or more per shrub. Later these cuts will stimulate the development of new shoots and keep the plant compact, healthy and finer textured. Do this every 2 to 3 years to maintain the plants vigor. If done every year for a number of years, the plant's stored

energy reserves dramatically decrease. The plant's density as well as both flower size and quantity will noticeably decline. However, if the spireas are kept in a vigorous, healthy state then annual pruning may be done. Consult your salesperson for specific advise on your situation.

encouraged. In addition, on some shrubs it may be important to prune to an outward facing bud to encourage a spreading, non-congested form. The main results of heading cuts is an increase in density, although it can also be useful in shaping.

Thinning cuts are made just above a side branch. (See Figure 3) Make the cut just above a side branch and roughly parallel to it. Thinning cuts allow more air circulation through the plant and make branching patterns more visible. Again, on some shrubs, it may be important to prune to an outward facing side branch.

EVERGREENS

Pruning evergreens correctly can be a difficult task for most people. While shearing may be a viable option for many evergreens, which will be discussed in the last section, a more natural approach may be desired.

“HAIRCUT” METHOD

The “haircut” method is really a modification of both rejuvenative and renewal pruning. This method is useful on both potentilla and smaller spireas such as ‘Anthony

Waterer’ and ‘Goldflame’. (See Table 1 for all the spirea types applicable)

In late March, spireas should be cut back to 1/3rd their height, while more woody

“HAIRCUT” METHOD



After 2-3 years, it is time to prune spireas.



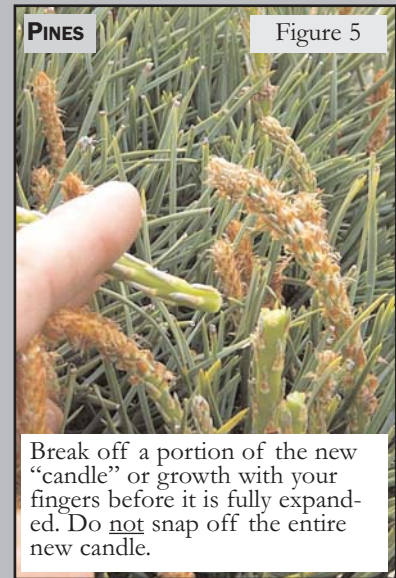
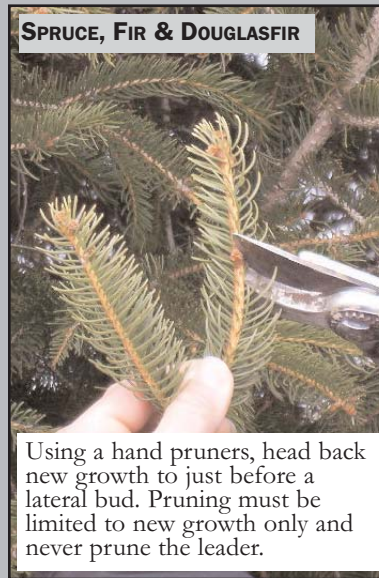
First start by indiscriminately cutting off 2/3rd's of the stems.



Then selectively remove many of the thickest stems entirely.

Figure 4

Figure 5



YEWS, JUNIPERS AND BOXWOOD

Shrubby junipers and yews generally must be pruned some every year, while boxwoods generally require less frequent attention. Traditionally, these shrubs were sheared after their flush of growth. However, it does not have to be done this way.

A more natural shape can be achieved by *selectively heading back the most vigorous branches to a side branch or bud in April or early May.* (See Figure 5 above) A second follow-up may be necessary around July, particularly for yews. Not only does this maintain a more natural form, it also creates a smaller, denser plant by inducing more lateral branching.

SPRUCE, FIR & DOUGLASFIR

Spruce, fir and douglasfir require little pruning after placement in the landscape. Most pruning is done in the nursery before the plant reaches you. **Any pruning done must be limited to only the new growth, since buds are not produced on older wood.**

Using a hand pruners, prune back to just before an existing lateral bud. (See Figure 5 above) This type of heading cut helps add density to the plant and can be useful in filling out thin areas. It is important to remember that you cannot make a spruce, fir or douglasfir smaller than it already is. In addition, never prune the leader. If the leader does become broken or damaged and multiple leaders result,

simply select one leader and remove the others.

PINES

Pines require still a different method. *They are the only evergreens pruned when it is actively growing.* The most commonly pruned pine is mugo pine and its many forms and selections, although the principle is applicable to any type of pine. In fact, mugo pines must be pruned every year, if you wish to keep them small.

Simply snap off a portion of the new "candle" with your fingers before it fully expands. (See Figure 5 above) The candle stage refers to the new terminal growth before it fully expands. **Do not snap off the entire new candle,** since that is the only growing point of the pine. Only remove up to 2/3's of the new candle. Candle pinching keeps the plant smaller and promotes lateral bud formation for a denser plant the following year.

HEDGING or SHEARING

Hedges will always be a part of our landscape in some way, shape or form. Unfortunately, many people do not know how to correctly maintain their hedge and, in fact, hasten its decline.

Generally plants must be sheared after the new

PRUNING HEDGES

Figure 6



The Wintergreen boxwood hedge is sheared to avoid vertical sides. The base should always be wider than the top to maintain light to the sides and help distribute the weight of snowload. A slightly rounded top also helps avoid snowload damage.

growth has flushed, but before it hardens off. Normally, this is in late May or June, although some plants may flush growth again, requiring a second or third shearing. Remember to use sharp pruning shears so they do not tear the stems.

When shearing hedges remember three basic rules. *First, avoid vertical sides. Second, the hedge should be broader at the base than at the top.* (See Figure 6) Both of these rules help maximize sunlight to the sides so the hedge remains dense to the ground. In addition, this shape helps more evenly distribute snowload, avoiding damage. Too often people begin shearing their hedges straight up and down. Each year the base becomes less and less dense until the hedge is completely bare at the base. *Third, the top of the hedge should not be flat; rather it should be slightly rounded to help shed snow accumulation.*

Rejuvenating a hedge can also be done, especially when it becomes too large. Prune the hedge back at least halfway during the dormant season. Then renewal prune it, removing the oldest, heaviest canes at the groundline. This will stimulate new growth rejuvenating the hedge. In addition, the renewed hedge is now at a more manageable height. However, remember all evergreens, broadleaf evergreens, burningbush and

corneliancherry dogwood, when used as a hedge, cannot be pruned in this manner and can be reduced only slightly using thinning cuts.

TREES

Regular pruning is the most important thing you can do for your tree(s). Proper pruning provides many benefits. However, if done improperly or too much, it can be harmful to your tree. Over-pruning can rob a tree of too many food producing leaves, delaying healing and regrowth.

Unfortunately learning to prune trees is not as easy as shrubs or evergreens. Rather, pruning trees is an art and requires proper training by knowledgeable professionals as well as experience and talent. It is important to have a professional arborist prune your tree(s) for the health of the tree. Your tree(s) are really a long term investment which need proper care to flourish.

If your trees are in need of pruning please give us a call. If we cannot help you, we will refer you to several of the certified, professional arborists with whom we work.

This said, one type of pruning which you can easily do on your trees is *removing any suckers from your trees*. Suckers are vigorous shoots arising from the roots of a tree. Most often the suckers are from a grafted rootstock and can overtake the desired plant on top. Remove the suckers in the dormant season using a scissor-type pruning shears at or slightly below the groundline. Generally this must be done every season, depending on the vigor of the plant.

Table 1:

Specific Pruning Requirements for Select Shrubs

Pruning Types: A) Renewal Pruning
 B) Rejuvenative Pruning
 C) Heading or Thinning
 D) "Haircut" Method
 E) Hedging or Shearing

The first option listed is the preferred choice, followed by alternative choices.

*Flowers prior to leaf out in early spring and may be pruned after the flowering, using the selected method.

Shrubs:

Fiveleaf Aralia - A, C, E
 White Forsythia - A, B, C
 Bottlebrush Buckeye - A, C
 Running Serviceberry - A, C
 Red Chokeberry - A, C
 Black Chokeberry - A, C
 Korean Barberry - A, B, C, E
 Japanese Barberry - A, C, E
 Purple Beautyberry - B, C
 Common Sweetshrub - A, C
 Siberian Peashrub - A, C
 Blue Mist Shrub - B, A, C
 Buttonbush - A, C
 Flowering Quince* - A, E
 Fringetree - C
 Summersweet Clethra - A, C
 Silky Dogwood, Siberian Dogwood, Gray Dogwood, Dwarf Dogwood, Redosier Dogwood and Rugose Dogwood - A, B, C
 Corneliancherry Dogwood - C, E
 American Filbert (Hazelnut) - A, C
 Purple Haze Filbert - A, C
 Contorted Filbert (Harry Lauder's Walking Stick) - C
 Smokebush - C, B
 Cranberry and Hess Cotoneaster - C
 Hedge Cotoneaster - A, B, C, E
 Daphne - C
 Deutzia - A, B, C
 Leatherwood - C
 Dwarf Bushhoneysuckle - A, B, C
 Burningbush - C, E
 Eastern Wahoo, European Euonymus (Spindletree), Nikko Euonymus, and Yeddo Euonymus - C
 Turkestan Euonymus - C, A
 Forsythia* - A, B, C
 Bronx Forsythia - A, C, E
 Fothergilla - C, A
 Witchhazel - C
 Seven Sons Flower - C
 Rose of Sharon - C
 Annabelle, Snowhill, and White Dome Hydrangea - B, C

Endless Summer Hydrangea - A, C
 PeeGee Hydrangea and selections - C, A (if started early)
 Oakleaf Hydrangea - A, C
 St. John's Wort (Hypericum) - C, D, A
 Winterberry - A, C
 Sweetspire (Itea) - A, C
 Japanese Kerria - A, B, C
 Beautybush - A, B, C
 Privet - A, B, C, E
 Honeysuckle - B, A, C, E
 Northern Bayberry - A, B, C
 Tree Peony - C
 Mockorange - A, C, B
 Ninebark - A, B, C
 Potentilla - D
 Purpleleaf Sandcherry - C
 Nanking Cherry* - A, C
 Double Flowering Plum (Rose-Tree of China)* - C
 Fernleaf Buckthorn - C, A
 Fragrant or Gro-Lo Sumac - A, B, C, E
 Staghorn Sumac, Smooth Sumac - A, B, C
 Alpine Currant - A, B, C, E
 Clove Currant - A, C
 Redleaf Rose, Rugose Rose, Prairie Rose, Father Hugo Rose and Virginia Rose - A, C
 Shrub Roses (Carefree Beauty, Knock Out, etc..) - C, A
 Dwarf Arctic Willow - B, A, E
 Hakura Nishiki Willow - C, B, A, E
 Creeping Willow - D, A, B, C
 Japanese Fantail Willow - C, A, B
 Elderberry - A, C
 Japanese White Spirea - D
 Tor Birchleaf Spirea - D, A
 Anthony Waterer, Crispa, Dakota Goldcharm, Dart's Red, Firelight, Froebel, Goldflame, Gumball, Magic Carpet, Neon Flash, Norman, Goldmound, Shibori (Peppermint), Alpine and Little Princess Spirea - D
 Grefsheim Spirea - A, C
 Fritsch Spirea - D, A, C
 Snowmound Spirea, Halward's Silver Spirea - A, C
 VanHoutte (Bridalwreath) Spirea - A, C
 Bladdernut - A, C
 Cutleaf Stephanandra - B, C
 Indiancurrant and Magic Berry Coralberry - A, B

Seasonal Maintenance of Perennials, Ornamental Grasses and Ferns

It used to be the norm to cut down most perennials in autumn. This left the garden nearly bare or empty, a very depressing site. Fortunately our appreciation of winter forms and colors has now extended to the perennial garden. The inclusion of ornamental grasses and evergreen and semi-evergreen perennials in today's gardens has made our winter gardens more cheery, but it has also made seasonal maintenance more difficult.

What looks good in the winter? What doesn't? Often it is in the eye of the beholder; however, we have attempted to share our knowledge and direction with you. If you are unsure, leave the plants up for the winter and see how you like them. If you don't like them, cut them down the next season in the fall. The following are brief discussions of the five schedules for seasonal maintenance or clean-up of herbaceous perennials, ornamental grasses and ferns.

FALL CLEAN-UP

The cooling nights of fall and the eventual freeze trigger plants to move their food and energy reserves to their root systems. It is after this hard freeze that it is time to cut back herbaceous plants, usually sometime in November for Wisconsin gardeners. (See Table 2 for specific plant instructions)

Typically the above ground foliage lays on the ground after freezing, as with daylilies and hostas; or it might be simply dried up and withered which holds little winter interest. Clean up these plants simply by cutting the dead foliage off just above the ground. You can dispose of this material in your compost pile. If you notice plants that are not fully dormant or dead, wait for the foliage to complete its lifecycle before cutting, as you may be hindering potential food storage for the roots. This food will be needed for beautiful plants next spring!

SPRING CLEAN-UP

Generally plants that need to be cleaned up in spring are divided into two categories: herbaceous plants with good winter interest or semi-evergreen perennials.

Herbaceous perennials with winter interest include purple coneflower, Autumn Joy sedum and siberian iris. Their colors, structure and/or seed heads make the garden more colorful and can attract wildlife for interest. After enjoying your plants for the winter, cut them back just above the ground in early spring. (See Figure 7) This is typically late March or early April in Wisconsin.

Ornamental grasses also add interest and movement to the winter landscape. If you chose to leave them up in winter, cut them back in spring. These grasses fall into two categories: cool season grasses that start their growing cycle early (usually when the soil first starts to warm in spring) and warm season grasses that do not start growing until May. Cool season grasses (marked with an * in Table 2) need to be cut back in late winter to avoid shearing the new growth tips. Warm season grasses can be cut within 1-3" of the ground. This foliage can then be added to your compost pile. A tip to



ease pick-up and handling is to tie taller ornamental grasses in a bundle before cutting.

Semi-evergreen perennials tend to keep their foliage color in early winter. Examples of semi-evergreen perennials include Clara Curtis mum, ladysmantle and Biokova geranium.

EVERGREEN PERENNIALS

Perennials in this maintenance group are green throughout the entire year; however, following an open winter (one which lacks adequate snow cover) their foliage often looks “beaten-up” and requires selective clean-up in spring. (See Figure 8 below) Using a hand pruner, selectively cut off the damaged leaves to improve its looks. Examples of these plants are: pignut (bergenia), coralbells and Christmas fern.



SEMI-SHRUBBY PERENNIALS

Other perennials form woody stems and tend to dieback part of the way and/or must be headed back to increase their density and decrease their floppy nature. (See Figure 9 above) Examples of these plants include: Russian sage, Powis Castle artemisia and tube clematis. Follow the directions for the “Haircut” method outlined in Figure 4.

SPRING EPHEMERALS

These plants are herbaceous perennials that have similar lifecycles as tulips or daffodil bulbs. Examples of these plants include: Jack-in-the-pulpit, Virginia bluebells and bleeding heart. After they are finished blooming in the spring, these plants go dormant or dieback completely in the heat and drought of summer. At that time, they can be cut back to make a neater appearance in the landscape.

Table 2:

Maintenance Requirements for Perennials, Orn. Grasses and Ferns

- Maint. Types: A) Fall Clean-up - cut back to the ground in fall after a heavy frost.
 B) Spring Clean-up - Leave perennial up for winter interest and cut back in early April.
 C) Evergreen Perennials - In early April, selectively remove damaged or dead foliage only.
 D) Semi-shrubby Perennials - Follow "Haircut" Method. (See shrubs)
 E) Spring Ephemeral - Cut back after it goes dormant in summer.

The first option listed is the preferred choice, followed by alternative choices.

* Make sure to cut back in extremely early spring so new growth is not pruned during clean-up.

Perennials:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Yarrow - A, B | Shooting Star - E |
| Monkshood - A | Coneflowers - B, A |
| Baneberry - A, B | Globe Thistle - A, B |
| Bugleweed (Ajuga) - C | Barrenwort (Epimedium) - A, B |
| Ladysmantle - B | Joe Pye Weed - A, B |
| Prairie Onion - B, A | Dalmation, Biokova, Cambridge and Karmina
Geranium - B |
| Ozawa Onion - B | Rozanne, Wargrave Pink, Beven's Variety,
Espresso, Ingwersen's Variety, Spessart,
Brookside and Wild Geranium - A |
| Leadplant - C, B | Prairie Smoke - C |
| Amsonia - A, B | Stinking Hellebore - C, B |
| Anemone - A, B | Daylilies - A |
| Columbine - A | Coralbellies - C, B |
| Spikenard - A, B | Hostas - A |
| Jack-in-the-Pulpit - E, A | Siberian Iris - B, A |
| Guizho Artemesia - B, A | Wild Iris - A |
| Powis Castle Artemesia - C | Mars Midget Pincushion Plant - A, B |
| Goatsbeard - A | Lavender - C, D |
| Canada Ginger - A | Liatris - B, A |
| European Ginger - C | Lily's - A |
| Red Milkweed - A, B | Virginia Bluebells - E |
| Butterflyweed - A, B | Monkeyflower - A, B |
| Asters - B, A | Bee Balm (Monarda) - A, B |
| Astilbes - B, A | Glade Mallow - B, A |
| Masterwort (Astrantia) - A, B | Catmint (Nepeta) - A, B |
| False Indigo (Baptisia) - A, B | Peonies - A |
| Pigsqueek (Bergenia) - C | Huskers Red Penstemon - C, B |
| Snowbank Boltonia - A, C | Russia Sage - D |
| Siberian Bugloss (Brunnera) - A | Fleeceflower (Persicaria) - B, A |
| Calamintha - D | Purple Prairie Clover - A, B |
| Blue Clips and White Clips Campanula - C | Phlox - A, B |
| Pink Turtlehead - A | Creeping Phlox - C |
| Alaska, Becky Shasta Daisy - B, A | Obedient Plant - A, B |
| Snakeroot - A | Mayapple - E |
| Tube Clematis - D | Solomon's Seal - A |
| Ground Clematis - B, A | Lungwort (Pulmonaria) - A, B |
| Coreopsis - A, B | Rudbeckias - B, A |
| White Bomb and Clara Curtis Mum - B | Great Coneflower (Rudbeckia) - B, C |
| Dianthus - B | Hairy Wild Petunia - A, B |
| Bleeding Heart - E | |
| Gasplant - A, B | |

