



## Pruning Shrubs

Now is a great time to prune deciduous (those that lose their leaves in the fall) while they are still dormant. Pruning can help control the size and maintain the shape of a shrub. It can also increase flowering, and most importantly, improve the health of a plant. Removing old or dead canes or branches, will greatly decrease the likelihood of disease occurrence.

For blooming shrubs, it is imperative to prune at the right time: some shrubs bloom on old wood (the wood they produced the year(s) prior) and others bloom on new wood – the wood they produce the same year as the flowers. Let's look at an example of each. Lilacs are a perfect example of a flowering shrub that blooms on old wood. When the shrub blooms in the spring, the flowers open, eventually die off, and new buds are then developed. Those new buds will open the following spring. Forsythia is another example of a shrub that blooms on old wood. If you were to prune these shrubs now, you would cut off their flower buds and have no flowers this spring! Now, if that happens by accident, it's not the death of the shrub. You'll just have to wait another year before you get flowers. The best time to prune these shrubs back is right after they bloom, and before they have a chance to produce next year's flower buds.

For those shrubs that bloom on new wood, such as summer-blooming spirea, are just the opposite. In the spring, they begin to grow, and the flower buds are produced. Those same flower buds open later in the season, usually in late spring, into summer. Pruning those shrubs back now is fine, because the flower buds haven't been produced yet. If you are unsure if your shrub blooms on new or old wood, a good rule of thumb is if it blooms in the spring, it blooms on old wood, and to prune right after flowering. If it blooms in the summer or fall, it blooms on new wood, and can be pruned in the winter/early spring.

Hand pruning, although it takes more time, will result in a more attractive plant with more foliage. Plants that are repeatedly cut with hedge trimmers, eventually develop a very shallow layer of foliage. One point on pruning, if you are pruning for yearly maintenance, or size control, it's a good idea to not remove more than 1/3 of the overall plant. Remove the oldest canes first, take your time, step back and see how each major cut has affected the appearance of the shrub before taking another.

One type of pruning that is often beneficial is renovation or rejuvenation pruning. Renovation of a shrub involves cutting down the entire shrub to within several inches of the soil, if possible. Sometimes shrubs that you want to cut down entirely are too old and large, in which case, you might leave as much as a foot of top growth. Renovation removes all the old, woody branches - these are the most susceptible to boring insect damage. It also removes any dead or diseased branches. Renovation allows the plant to re-grow in its natural form, and forces the plant to send out new, vigorous growth that is often healthier than the older growth that was removed.

However, renovation usually results in a lack of heavy flowering for at least a season while the plant re-grows. Renovation pruning can be done during the dormant period. Some shrubs, like evergreens, will not tolerate renovation pruning, so be sure to do a little research before cutting!

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