

PRUNING DECIDUOUS SHRUBS

Deciduous shrubs shed their leaves in the fall. A few species may retain some leaves during a mild winter.

A shrub usually consists of several stems or trunks growing from or near the ground. Most deciduous shrubs renew themselves by canes that develop from the base. As the canes age the bark gradually dulls and often loosens and flakes. Then the canes become like trunks. When these trunks develop, the annual growth becomes weaker. On flowering shrubs, the flowers may be sparse or smaller.

Pruning may be needed to remove dead or diseased tissue, keep the natural shape as much as possible, control size and shape, encourage new wood with flowing buds to form, or rejuvenate overgrown or older shrubs.

WHEN TO PRUNE

Light pruning of small twiggy growth and broken, dead, weak or densely shaded branches can be done at any time of year, but avoid pruning during rainy weather. Wounds are more susceptible to invasion of insects and wood-rotting diseases in wet or humid conditions.

Dormant Season (after leaves fall and before the beginning of growth in spring) - Pruning at this time encourages rapid plant development in the spring when new growth begins.

Mid to Late Summer (plants are in a semi-dormant state) - Summer pruning retards the growth of a shrub that has reached a desired height and spread. Wounds do not callus over rapidly at this time so it's best to keep summer pruning cuts small. This is a good time to remove suckering wood at the base of shrubs; it is less likely to grow back. When leaves start to turn color, hold off on pruning until after they have fallen.

Worst Time To Prune - Pruning just after new leaves arrive may deprive the plant of sufficient energy to replace its foliage. The exception is spring-flowering shrubs, which should be pruned immediately after flowering.

IMPROVING PLANT APPEARANCE

A rule of thumb with pruning is to first remove dead branches. Since these may be quite dry and hard, a small folding saw works better than pruning shears. Try to leave as small a stub as possible.

C110 – Pruning Deciduous Shrubs

Next, remove dying branches. If cankers or other disease symptoms are present, clean your pruning tools with rubbing alcohol or dip in a solution of one part household bleach to nine parts water between pruning cuts. Cut dead plant parts back to a healthy bud or side branch.

To help prevent further problems, remove dead and dying branches from the area. If a disease or insect infestation has been diagnosed, these cuttings should be disposed of.

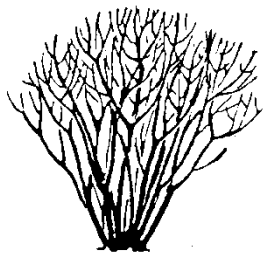
KEEPING THE NATURAL SHAPE

Pruning promotes compact growth and should develop the natural shape of the plant. Ideally, shrubs are spaced so the branches of mature plants intermingle slightly with each other. Slow growers and dwarf shrubs may need little pruning. However, most deciduous shrubs are very vigorous and few remain under three feet.

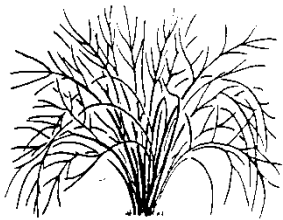
Before pruning any shrub, observe the distinct and natural growth of the shrub. Deciduous shrubs look best and are easiest to maintain if their natural shape is kept.

When buying new shrubs, choose ones that will still fit the space when they grow to full size. Ask at a nursery or refer to a book on shrubs and small trees for this information.

SHRUB FORMS



Stiff upright or vase shaped shrubs: Use as property dividers, screen or hedge. Examples are: Mock-Orange (*Philadelphus*), Lilacs (*Syringa*), Red-Osier Dogwood (*Cornus*)



Arching or Weeping shrubs: Use as specimens or background shrubs. Examples are: Forsythia, Beauty Bush (*Kolkwitzia amabilis*) *Spiraea van houttei*.



Rounded or mounding shrubs: Use accents or backgrounds for other plants. Examples are: Burning Bush (*Euonymus alata*) and Flowering Quince (*Chaenomeles*) or *Hydrangea paniculata*

PRUNING METHODS

There are four methods of pruning deciduous shrubs:

Method 1 - Prune shrubs by removing the weakest stems at ground level. Use long-handled loppers or a small curved pruning saw if stems are larger than one inch in diameter. This reduces the bulk of the shrub and improves its health by allowing air and light into the interior. Vigorous established shrubs may need as many as 1/3 of the oldest canes cut to the base annually. New canes emerge from the base of the plant.

Method 2 - Reduce the size and density of a shrub by cutting selected side branches back to a main branch or to the trunk. This is especially effective with fountain shaped shrubs.

Method 3 - Rejuvenating an overgrown, declining shrub may require cutting the entire plant to the ground. New shoots will grow from the roots. Prune these shoots annually to contain their growth. Use methods 1 and 2 to shape the new growth.

Method 4 - Another method is shearing. Simply remove outer foliage with a manual or power trimmer to create a smooth surface. This results in a formal appearance like that used for hedges and topiary. For a neater appearance, it may be necessary to trim up to three times a growing season.

OTHER TERMS USED FOR PRUNING CUTS

Thinning-out: pruning reduces the height and spread of a plant. Some limbs may be removed completely. A thinned shrub retains its natural shape and is not subject to vigorous watersprouts.

Heading: or stubbing is commonly used to reduce shrub size, but while more rapid than thinning, the results are in most cases much less desirable. Regrowth is vigorous and upright from buds just below the cuts. The new branches are long shoots that cast dense shade and are weakly attached to the older branches.

PRUNING DECIDUOUS SHRUBS

Acer palmatum - (Japanese maple): Small multi-stemmed trees that can be used as a shrub. Remove crossing branches, then excess inside growth. Prune during the late dormant season. (before new buds leaf out).

Amelanchier - (Serviceberry) Remove crossing, crowded and dead branches. *A. stolonifera* forms spreading clumps. Occasionally remove the oldest stems to ground level. Dig up and cut away the outer edges of the clumps to limit the size of the shrub. Prune in early spring before growth starts.

Azaleas (deciduous): Azaleas bloom in mid-spring. Remove deadwood and flower trusses before they go to seed. Large plants can be thinned out to reduce their size or cut back by one third each year for 3 years. Prune during early spring (some bloom will be lost).

Berberis - (Barberry): Barberries can be sheared. For natural growth, thin or rejuvenate by removing old wood to the ground. Prune during the late dormant season (before new buds leaf out).

C110 – Pruning Deciduous Shrubs

Buddleia species - (Butterfly bush, summer lilac): Buddleia flowers on the new growth during mid-summer. Buddleia tops die to the ground in cold winter areas. Cut out the dead canes to ground level. If they do not winter kill, prune to the ground during the late dormant season. (before new buds leaf out).

Caragana arborescens -(Pea shrub) Caragana can be used as a clipped hedge. Shear back as needed during the growing season. Removing spent flowers will help prevent volunteer seedlings. Prune in early spring.

Caryopteris clandonensis -(Hybrid bluebeard, Blue mist): These shrubs bloom in late summer and fall on new growth. Treat as a perennial in cold winter areas. If not killed back naturally, cut to within a few inches from the ground. Prune in late winter, early spring.

Chaenomeles species - (Flowering quince): Early spring blooms are borne on one year and older growth. Cut back new growth at least one third and also remove suckers. Budding branches can be cut for flower arrangements. Prune during the dormant stage (may lose some flowers) or after blooming.

Cornus sericea (Cornus stolonifera) - (Red-osier dogwood, red-twigg dogwood): Prune by thinning one third of the oldest stems at the base every year to promote the bright red stems.

Corylus avellana - (European filbert, European hazelnut): This shrub can be trained as a small tree. If grown as a shrub, thin out occasionally. Always remove suckers. Prune during the dormant stage.

Cotoneaster species - (Cotoneaster): There are both tall and low growing forms. **Low growers** - remove dead wood and thin annually. Thin back to the ground or trunk. Shearing leaves unsightly stubs. Old shrubs can be rejuvenated by cutting all of the shrub to the ground. **Tall growers** - should be pruned to retain their natural shape. Prune in late winter, early spring..

Cytisus species - (Broom): Flowers during early spring. Brooms should be pruned back annually. Old woody brooms are harder to rejuvenate and may even die if the older wood is pruned. Cut back stems by one third in length. It's best to discard old leggy plants and start with new ones. Prune after flowering.

Daphne (deciduous species) - (Daphne): An occasional snip will help correct the shape of the plant. Branches can be cut during bloom time for bouquets. If a spreading form is desired, cut back to a lateral branch or just above an outward facing bud. Cutting to inside buds will direct the growth upward.

Deutzia scabra -(Deutzia): Deutzia blooms during the spring. Thin annually to keep the shrub compact. (Can grow to 10 feet tall.) Cut to the ground every five years to rejuvenate. Prune after flowering.

Euonymus alata -(Burning bush)(deciduous): Rarely needs much pruning. Can be thinned out selectively or sheared for a formal hedge. Prune during the late dormant season, before new buds leaf out.

Forsythia intermedia - (Forsythia): Forsythia is one of the earliest spring blooming shrubs. Best pruned to keep the arching form. Thin out the oldest wood at the base every year. To reduce the size,

C110 – Pruning Deciduous Shrubs

thin the tallest branches. Prune after flowering. Old Forsythia can be rejuvenated by cutting off all of the shrub to the ground.

Hamamelis species - (Witch hazel): Witch hazel blooms from late January to mid March depending on the cultivar. Prune to maintain size after desired height is reached. Prune before or after blooming. *Hamamelis mollis*: Prune lightly during the winter to keep open branch pattern.

Hydrangea macrophylla & *Hydrangea quercifolia* - (Big leaf and Oak leaf hydrangeas): Blooms on buds formed after last year's growth. Mid-summer flowering. Cut back stems right after flowering to about 2 feet in height. Rejuvenate plants that failed to flower by cutting back every year to about 2 feet.

Hydrangea paniculata, - (Panicle hydrangea - Peegee hydrangea): This shrub blooms in the summer on new growth. If overgrown, thin out to leave three or four main branches about 2 feet from the ground. Prune during the late winter, early spring.

Kerria japonica:- (Kerria) Flowers appear on last year's growth in spring. Cut back branches that are weak or have flowered to the ground. Prune after flowering.

Kolkwitzia amabilis - (Beauty bush): These shrubs grow in an upright and then an arching shape and bloom on last year's growth. Cut up to 1/3 of the oldest canes to the ground each year. Choose the stems that are the woodiest and prune after they have flowered. Old neglected shrubs can be rejuvenated by cutting all of the shrub to the ground.

Ligustrum Privet: (Privet) Use as a sheared hedge or in a natural form. Shear for formal shape or thin at the base to maintain as an informal shrub or hedge. Prune during the dormant season and trim as necessary.

Lonicera species - (Bush honeysuckle): *L. tatarica* is a 9 foot tall vase shaped shrub. Thin branches at the ground level to rejuvenate and control size during the late winter or early spring.

Philadelphus coronarius - (Mock orange): Mock orange is vase shaped, growing up to 10 feet tall. This shrub flowers during June on last year's growth. Cut 1/3 of oldest canes to the ground annually. Prune after flowering or rejuvenate during the dormant season.

Potentilla fruticosa - (Shrubby cinquefoil): Potentilla forms flowers on new wood in the summer. Thin weakest wood in spring. Cut to side branch inside shrub. Remove branches that form a mat underneath the shrub. Prune during dormant season.

Prunus cistina - (Purple-leaf sand cherry): A shrub reaching 8 to 10 feet tall and at least as wide. Thin old or crowded canes to the base annually after flowering.

Prunus glandulosa - (Dwarf flowering almond): This shrub blooms in spring on one year old wood. Immediately after flowering, cut back to stimulate new growth.

Spiraea species -(Bridal wreath spirea): Most spireas bloom in spring on last year's wood. Prune spring bloomers after flowering. *Spiraea-bumalda* (Anthony Waterer and other bumalda hybrids) bloom during the summer on new wood. Thin each year to renew wood and promote flowering. Prune summer flowering species during the late winter or early spring.

C110 – Pruning Deciduous Shrubs

Syringa vulgaris - (Lilac): Keep pruned and thinned out to promote flowering. As lilacs begin to age, thin 1/3 of the older stems to the ground. Overgrown lilac bushes can be rejuvenated by cutting back 1/3 each year for 3 years, or can be cut completely to the ground. Remove faded blossoms to promote better flowering. Prune after flowering or during dormant season for rejuvenation.

Viburnum species - (Viburnum): The many species grow from 5 to 15 feet high and are spring blooming. Viburnums need little pruning. Thin the oldest wood occasionally to keep the shrubs healthy. Prune in early spring before new leaves appear.

Weigela - (Weigela): Once the flowers have faded, cut back these flowering branches to strong new laterals. Prune out most of the stems that are more than two years old. In cold climates, prune after the danger of frost is over. Cut stems all the way back to the ground. New stems will soon appear. Keep only the sturdiest and best placed ones.