

# Horticulture

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## Pruning Improves Plant Health

Pruning shrubs and trees can be a daunting task. The novice must deal with how to prune, when to prune, what to prune, how much to prune, and what tool(s) to use.

The primary reasons for pruning landscape plants are to direct growth, to improve plant health, and to increase production of flowers and fruit.

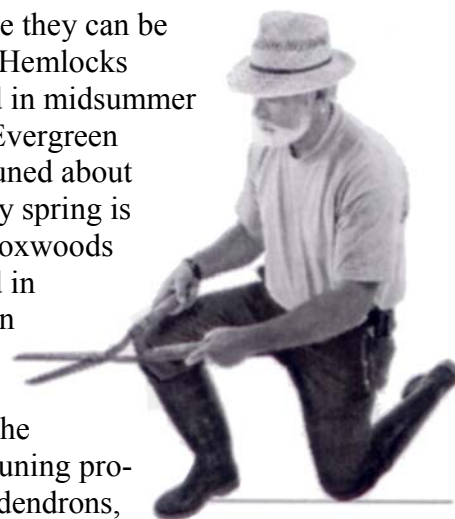
Thinning reduces the size of the plant (density), which allows more light and air to reach the plant's interior. This lessens its chance of developing disease. The plant also will produce more vigorous growth and become stronger. Removing damaged, dead, or dying branches will limit the spread of diseases and discourage rot organisms.

Proper pruning encourages flower and fruit production by keeping the plant in a state of active growth. When side branches are removed, the central leader of the main trunk is stimulated to grow faster. When the tips of the central leader and major side branches are removed, smaller side branches grow faster. Pruning stimulates hormones located in the buds.

For spring-flowering trees and shrubs, a general rule is to prune as needed immediately after flowering. Prune summer-flowering shrubs and trees as needed in the early spring before new growth begins.

Pine and spruce trees should be pruned in the spring just after new growth to slow their rate of

growth; otherwise they can be pruned anytime. Hemlocks should be pruned in midsummer for best results. Evergreen shrubs can be pruned about anytime, but early spring is generally best. Boxwoods should be pruned in spring to maintain their shape.



Deadheading, the recommended pruning procedure for rhododendrons, involves carefully removing the spent flower stems from the plant while not damaging the new buds at the base of the stem.

Leggy or overgrown rhododendrons can be reshaped, reduced, and reinvigorated by carefully removing a third of the large branches each year over three years. This technique is also useful on yew, azalea, holly, and boxwood.

### Pruning tools

- scissors-style or bypass hand pruners for wood up to 3/4 inch in diameter
- bypass loppers for branches up to 1 1/4 inches thick
- pruning saws for larger branches