

Horticulture

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Pruning Ornamentals

Correct pruning is essential in maintaining healthy, vigorous, attractive plants. Some reasons plants are pruned are to reduce their size; to remove undesirable growth; to remove dead, diseased, or broken branches; to stimulate flowering; and to rejuvenate old plants.

Timing of pruning depends on the age and type of plant, desired outcome, and how severely the plant is to be pruned.

Trees

Light pruning can usually be done anytime. Unwanted growth is most easily removed while it is small, and early removal will have a less dwarfing effect. Broken, dead, weak, or heavily shaded branches of most species can be removed anytime of the year with little effect on plant vigor. However, some deciduous trees (Birch, Elm, Dogwood, Maples, Walnut, Yellowwood) have heavy sap flow in early spring and may "bleed" if pruned at that time. Although bleeding is usually not harmful to plants, heavy and persistent bleeding can be aesthetically displeasing, can cause bark injury below the cut, and can retard wound healing. To minimize bleeding on susceptible species, make small cuts (less than 3 inches in diameter) and prune in the fall or winter.

Dogwood, redbud, hawthorn, magnolia, crabapple, and flowering cherry should be pruned immediately after flowering in the spring. If they are pruned before flowering, the flower buds will be removed.

Ornamental sumac, goldenrain tree, and stewartia are summer-flowering trees, which should be pruned while dormant in late winter or early spring.

To improve the density of pines, spruce, and firs, pinch out half of the new growth of both terminal and lateral buds in spring or early summer.

Shrubs

The pruning of deciduous shrubs can be divided into two main categories: maintenance or selective pruning and rejuvenation pruning. Deciduous shrubs require maintenance pruning to keep growth consistent with the natural plant form and in scale with surroundings. This technique must be started when the plants are young and continued routinely as the plant grows. If the shrub is a flowering plant, the timing of maintenance pruning is determined by

the time of flowering. Shrubs that flower before the end of June should have maintenance pruning shortly after flowering.

These include:

- Azalea
- Deutzia
- Forsythia
- Lilac
- Mt. Laurel
- Quince
- Serviceberry
- Spirea
- Sweetshrub
- Viburnum
- Weigela
- Wisteria

Shrubs that flower after the end of June, (Beauty Berry, Butterfly Bush, Glossy Abelia, Hydrangea, Rose-of-Sharon, and St. Johnswort) should be pruned in late winter or early spring before new growth starts.

Rejuvenation pruning is used to invigorate older, neglected shrubs. This pruning has to be done while the plant is dormant during late winter or early spring. In most cases, this means flowering will not occur that year. Delaying rejuvenation pruning until after leaves have developed may have a detrimental effect on plant vigor. Rejuvenation is not practical for most narrow leaf evergreens. An exception is yews (*Taxus*).

Vines

Clematis and wisteria cause many people trouble. For pruning, there are two groups of clematis. The most common species in the first group (*Clematis jackmanii* and *C. paniculata*) bloom on current season's wood. Periodically, they must be cut back hard in late winter or early spring to encourage new flowering wood. The other group includes spring-blooming clematis (*C. montana* and *C. alpine*) that produce flowers from short shoots that developed the previous season. They require pruning right after flowering.

Wisteria requires pruning twice a year. In summer, about two months after flowering, prune back the long, straggly laterals to within five or six buds of a main branch. In late winter, cut back the shoots from laterals pruned in summer to within two or three buds of their base. These short spurs will bear the coming season's flowers.

Roses

The best time to prune roses that bloom all summer is in early spring before the leaf buds open but after cold weather. Roses that bloom only once usually bear their flowers on year-old wood. Prune these roses right after bloom to avoid cutting off next year's flowering wood. Some light pruning may be required in the spring to remove winter-damaged and weak canes.