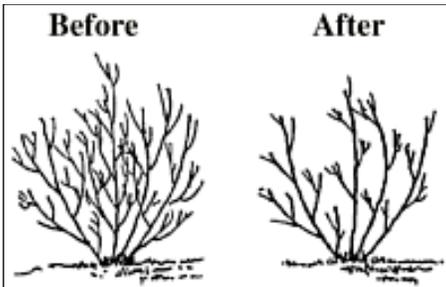




Pruning Shrubs

Deciduous Shrubs

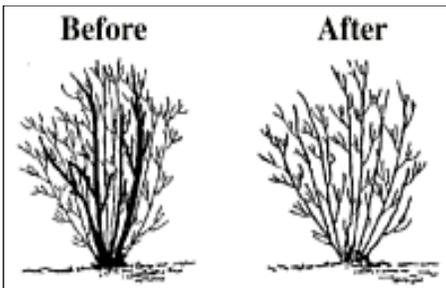
The pruning recommended for most deciduous shrubs consists of thinning out, gradual renewal, and rejuvenation pruning.



In **thinning** out, a branch or twig is cut off either at its point of origin from the parent stem, to a lateral side branch, to the “Y” of a branch junction, or at ground level. Thin out the oldest and tallest stems first to allow for growth of vigorous side branches. This method of pruning results in a more open plant and does not stimulate excessive new top growth. Considerable growth can be cut out without changing the plant’s natural appearance or habit of growth. Plants can be maintained at a given height and width for years by thinning out. This method of pruning is best done with pruning shears, loppers, or a saw

(not hedge shears).

In **gradual renewal** pruning, a few of the oldest and tallest branches are removed at or slightly above ground level on an annual basis. Some thinning may be necessary to shorten long branches or maintain a symmetrical shape.



To **rejuvenate** an old, overgrown shrub, 1/3 of the oldest, tallest branches can be removed at or slightly above ground level before new growth starts.

When the shrub to be pruned is grown for its flowers, the pruning must be timed to minimize disruption of the blooming. Spring flowering shrubs bloom on last season’s growth and should be pruned soon after they bloom. This allows for vigorous growth during the summer and to provide flower buds for the following year.

Some examples of shrubs that bloom on last season’s growth:

Cercis chinensis
Deutzia species
Derria japonica
Philadelphus species
Rosa species
Tamarix parviflora
Chinese redbud
Spring-flowering dertzias
Honeysuckle
Andromeda species
Early white spirea species
Old-fashioned weigela

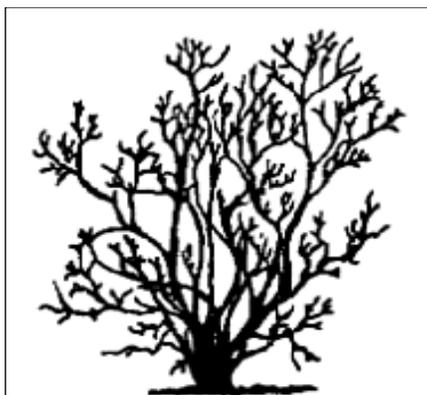
Chaenomeles japonica
Exochorda racemosa
Lonicera species
Pieris species
Spiraea species
Viburnum species
Japanese quince
Pearlbush
Star magnolia
Azaleas
Lilac species

Chionathus virginicus
Forsythia species
Magnolia stollata
Rhododendron species
Syringa species
Weigela florida
Fringe tree
Kerria
Mockorange species
Rambling rose species
Small-flowered tamarix

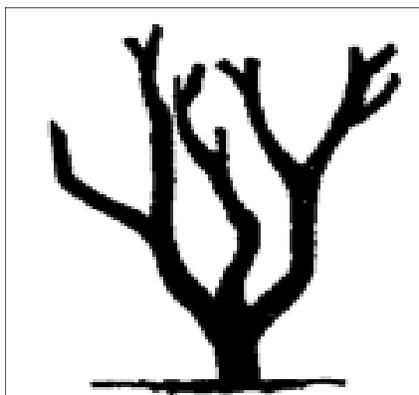
Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

The general pruning procedure, illustrated below for crape-myrtle, applies to many other large shrubs and small trees of similar structure.

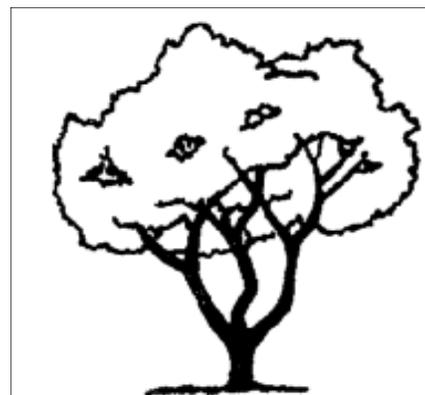
Proper Pruning Methods



The plant, pictured before pruning, needs to have all weak and dead stems removed.



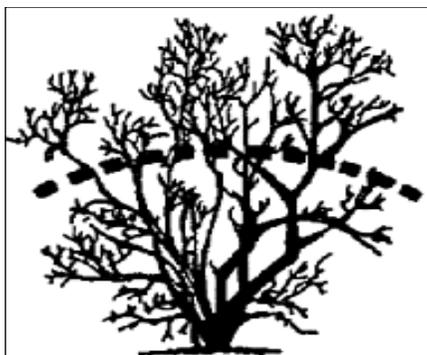
Same shrub after removal of weak and interfering wood, also base sucker growth



Results of proper pruning —graceful, vigorous growth with distinctive shape

Some shrubs that bloom after June usually do so from buds which are formed the same spring. Such shrubs should be pruned in late winter to promote vigorous growth in the spring.

Improper Pruning Methods



Cutting at the dotted line is the usual course taken by those who prune shrubs



The same plant after bad pruning, as indicated above. The sucker growth remains.



Result: the lovely natural shape of the shrub is lost and bloom will be sparse

Some examples of shrubs that bloom on current season's growth:

Abelia x grandiflora

Clethra alnifolia

Hydrangea paniculata

Rosa species

Symphoricarpos

Vitex agnus-cactus

Japanese beauty bush

Shrub althea

Saint Johnswort

Anthony Waterer Spirea

Snowberry

Buddleia davidii, globosa

Hibiscus syriacus

Hypericum species

Spiraea bumalda

Tamarix hispida

Glossy abelia

Bluebeard

Hills of Snow

Crape myrtle

Mikado Spirea

Kashgar

Callicarpa japonica

Hydrangea arborescens

Lagerstroemia indica

Spiraea japonica

Tamarix odessana

Butterfly bush

Summersweet

Peegee Hydrangea

Bush rose

Coralberry

Odessa

Evergreen Shrubs

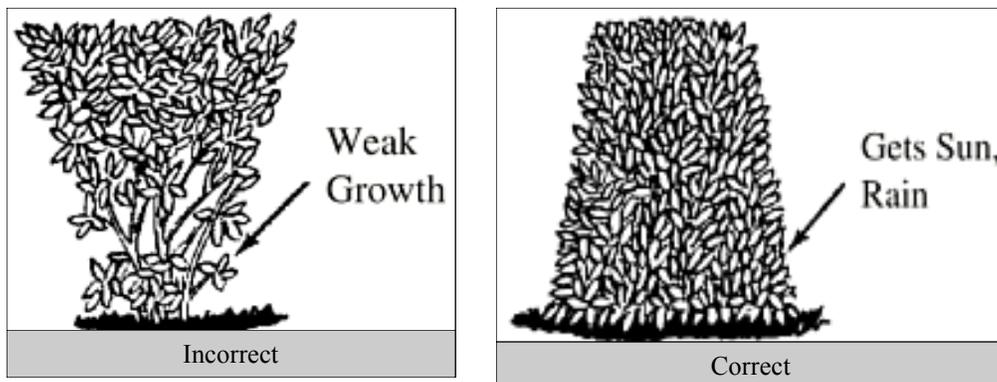
For most evergreen shrubs, thinning is the most desirable procedure. Some evergreens can be sheared when a stiff, formal appearance is desired; however, they will still need to be thinned occasionally. Both evergreen and deciduous shrubs grown for foliage should be pruned in late winter before new growth starts. Minor corrective pruning can be done at any time.

Hedges consist of plants set in a row so as to merge into a solid, linear mass. They have served gardeners for centuries as screens, fences, walls, and edgings.

Improper Pruning Methods

A well-shaped hedge is no accident. It must be trained from the beginning. The establishment of a deciduous hedge begins with the selection of nursery stock. Choose young trees or shrubs 1 to 2 feet high, preferably multiple-stemmed. When planting, cut the plants back to 6 or 8 inches. This will induce low branching. Late in the first season or before bud-break in the next, prune off half of the new growth. In the following year, again trim off half the new growth to encourage branching.

In the third year, start shaping. Hedges are often shaped with flat tops and vertical sides. This unnatural shaping is seldom successful. The best shape, as far as the plant is concerned, is a natural form—rounded or slightly pointed top with sides slanting to a wide base. After plants have been pruned initially to induce low branching, the low branching will be maintained by trimming the top narrower than the bottom, so that sunlight can reach all of the leaves on the plant.



Rounded or peaked tops aid shedding snow, which, if left, may break branches. Before shaping, some thought should be given to the shape of the untrimmed plant. For example, naturally conical arborvitae does particularly well in a Gothic arch shape. Common buckthorn, a spreading plant, is more easily shaped to a Roman arch.

Trim to the desired shape before the hedge grows to the desired size. Never allow the plants to grow untrimmed to the final height before shearing; by that time it will be too late to get maximum branching at the base. After the hedge has reached the dimensions desired, trim closely in order to keep it within bounds.

Evergreen nursery stock for hedging need not be as small as deciduous material, and should not be cut back when planted. Trim lightly after a year or two. Start shaping as the individual plants merge into a continuous hedge. Do not trim too closely because many needle-bearing evergreens do not easily generate new growth from old wood.

These questions often arise: “How often should this hedge be trimmed?” and “When should I trim?” Answers depend to some extent on how formal an appearance is desired. In general, trim before the growth exceeds 1 foot. Hedges of slow-growing plants, such as boxwood, need trimming sooner. Excessive untrimmed growth will kill leaves beneath and also pull the hedge out of shape. This is especially true with weak-stemmed shrubs.

In the mountains and cooler areas, yews and other evergreens may need shearing only once annually and then not before July; in milder areas, two or even three shearings may be necessary. Deciduous material should be trimmed earlier than July, but after the spring flush of new growth and will often need to be trimmed once or twice more. Frequency depends on the kind of shrub, season, and degree of neatness desired.

What can be done with a large, overgrown, bare-bottomed, and misshapen hedge? If it is deciduous, the answer is fairly simple. In the spring, before leaves appear, prune to one foot below the desired height. Then trim carefully for the next few years to give it the shape and fullness desired. Occasionally, hedge plants may have declined too much to recover from this treatment; replacing them may be necessary.

Rejuvenating evergreen hedges is more difficult. As a rule, evergreens cannot stand the severe pruning described above. Arborvitae and yew are exceptions; other evergreen hedges may have to be replaced.

What tools should be used to trim hedges? The traditional pair of scissor-action hedge shears is still the best all-around tool. It will cut cleaner and closer than electric trimmers, which often break and tear twigs. Hand shears can be used on any type of hedge, while electric trimmers do poorly on large-leaved and wiry-twiggged varieties, and sometimes jam on thick twigs. Hand shears are also quieter and safer, less likely to gouge the hedge or the operator. Hand pruners are useful for removing a few stray branches. Larger branches can be removed with loppers and/or a pruning saw.

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Source: <http://cals.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/mg/pruning/shrubs.html>