

Pruning ABC's for Healthy Trees and Shrubs

Presenter: Bess Bronstein

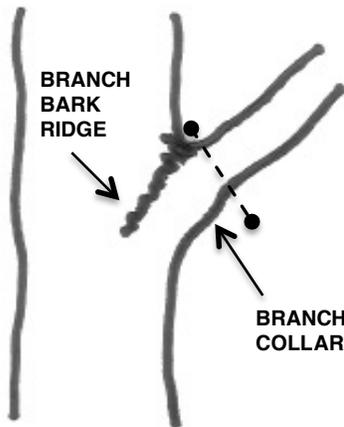
KNOW YOUR PRUNING OBJECTIVE

Whether your objective is to increase flowering, clean out dead branches, or simply manage the size of your tree or shrub, you need to know **WHY** you are pruning. Regardless of your objective, the result of your pruning should maintain or improve the health of the plant, which will ultimately lead to a nicer looking plant every time.

TYPES OF PRUNING CUTS

Branch Removal Cut

Remove the branch just outside of the branch collar. Be careful not to leave a stub, and do not make a flush cut. This cut should be used for the majority of pruning of ornamental trees as well as many kinds of shrubs.

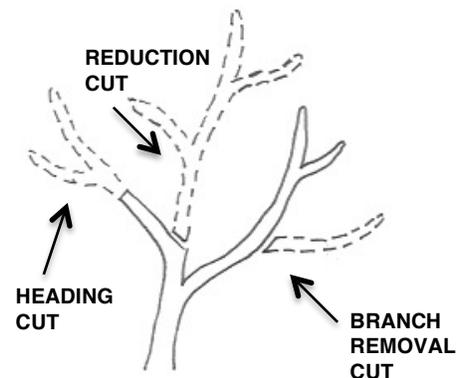


Heading Cut

Heading cuts are made only partway back on a stem and often result in excessive regrowth at the point where the cuts were made. Avoid these cuts on trees and tree-like shrubs unless you are trying to encourage more branching.

Reduction Cut

This pruning cut is used to selectively reduce size yet still keep the natural form of the plant. It can be combined with branch removal cuts to thin or reduce density in plants without encouraging excessive regrowth, thus giving you more time before you need to prune again.



Shearing Cut

Shearing cuts are often used on shrubs, generally when pruning to shape a hedge or topiary. Shearing consists of many heading cuts made into the newest growth of a shrub, resulting in dense twig regrowth on the outside of the plant. Repeated shearing ultimately leads to dieback of foliage and twigs in the plant's interior.

WHAT TYPE OF CUT IS BEST?

For most ornamental trees and many shrubs, use branch removal and reduction cuts to maintain the natural form of the plant. Allowing filtered light into the inner part of trees and larger shrubs prevents excessive inner dieback and decreases pest and disease issues. Heading cuts are best made if your pruning objective is to increase branching, and are best done during dormancy.

Shearing is not the answer for most plants. While some shrubs are suitable for shearing as hedges or topiary, most shrubs are easily kept looking good by removing or reducing older and wrong-way stems. Repeated shearing will simply encourage the plant to send out more unwanted stems, losing its natural form.

REMOVE THE “4 Ds” FIRST

Begin by removing **Dead**, **Damaged** and **Diseased** branches. Often that is all you need to do to make a plant look tidier and less oppressive. The final D is for those branches that could be labeled as **Deranged**. These include competing leaders in young trees, branches that are seriously crossing or rubbing other branches, branches that are blocking walkways, or previously stubbed or poorly pruned branches.

LESS IS MORE. PRUNE MODERATELY

Stay within your pruning ‘budget’ – the amount of pruning of live branches and foliage that can be done without damage to the plant. Most ornamental trees and shrubs do better if a smaller amount of live growth is pruned rather than a larger amount at one pruning. For most healthy plants, **remove no more than 15% to 25% of live tissue at one time** in order to keep the new growth response more moderate and natural looking.

TIMING

Pruning small amounts of a plant to maintain its form can be done anytime. Winter is a good time to prune to encourage new growth in the spring, while pruning in summer has a dwarfing effect. Consider pruning vigorous plants in summer rather than winter in order to prevent an excess of new growth. Be sure your plants are healthy if you choose to prune in summer, and prune lightly so as not to cause any additional stress. Summer pruning can begin soon after the initial growth of new stems and foliage has slowed. It is a good time to prune plants that are subject to suckering when pruned in winter, and may actually help stop the yearly cycle of these vigorous and unwanted branches!

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Remember – Wander, ponder, and then prune.

