

Prune Like the Pros

by *Charlie Nardozi at GardeningwithCharlie.com*

Pruning your trees, shrubs and vines can be an intimidating process for many gardeners. But fear not! You can prune like the pros with some guidance and confidence. In this demo, I'll show the basics of pruning trees, shrubs and vines and the different types of pruning tools needed. We will cover various types of pruning cuts, how to prune a young tree, how to renovate an overgrown shrub and when to prune different plants.



Why Prune?

- To remove dead, diseased and broken branches
- To improve branch structure and angles
- To shape a plant and keep it “in bounds”
- To reduce crossing, shading, and rubbing branches
- To open up a plant for better flowering and fruiting

Pruning Tools

Hand pruners- Use anvil pruners for dead wood and by-pass pruners for live wood. Use ratcheting pruners for power assisted pruning. Hand pruners are good for pruning branches up to ½-inch in diameter

Hand Saw- Cuts on pull. Sharp and good for branches between 1- and 4-inches in diameter

Lopper- Good for thorny plants like brambles and roses. Good for up to 2-inch diameter branches. Some types have extending handles

Hedge Trimmer- Manual, gas and electric types. For small jobs use manual hedge trimmers. Battery powered types are safer than gas and corded trimmers

Pole Pruner- Extension pruner that can cut branches that are 14 feet high. Saw and pruner in one pole pruner. Gas powered and electric versions are available.

Pruning Cuts

Clean Cuts- Make clean cuts just outside the branch collar. Cut ¼ inch above a bud on a branch and at a 45 degree angle.

Thinning Out- Used to remove whole branches back to a main branch, trunk, or ground. Good technique to reduce the size of shrubs and trees while keeping the natural shape. Opens up the center of shrubs and trees as well.

Heading Back- Removes the ends of branches which forces side buds to grow creating a wall of foliage. Used to keep hedges tight and to make topiaries.

Suckers- Shoots that grow from the ground or base of the plant straight up. Often they crowd the plant. The number of these produced depends on the type and variety of plant.

Water Sprouts- Shoots that grow straight up from the branches. Often stimulated by pruning cuts made in winter. Summer pruning reduces the number of these shoots. Often they crowd the plant. The number of these produced depends on the type and variety of plant.

Tip Pruning- Snipping off the tip of a trunk or branch to force the buds below the tip to sprout

Deadheading- Removing dead flowers right below the blossom

When to Prune What?

Old Wood Bloomers- These are spring to early summer flowering shrubs such as forsythia, spirea, rhododendron and lilac. These plants flowers on 1 year old wood. Prune right after blooming. For most, such as lilacs, you have about a 6 to 8 week window to prune before flower buds are set for next year. Pruning in fall removes these flowers.

New Wood Bloomers- These are summer to fall blooming shrubs such as potentilla, glossy abelia, and butterfly bush. Prune in winter to early spring. These plants flower on new wood that grows in spring and summer.

Rejuvenation Pruning- Cut back the whole shrub to the ground or back to a framework of main branches to stimulate new growth. Can be used on some over grown shrubs that respond to severe pruning. Can be used to promote more colorful branches on shrubs such as dogwoods and on willows to stimulate young branches for craft use.

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