

A Simple Approach & Best Tools for Pruning Most Shrubs and Small Garden Trees

Listed below is a basic set of tools that most professionals keep in their tool kit and that work well for pruning most types of small trees and shrubs in home gardens:

Three essential tools.



- 1 Bypass blade hand pruners: up to ½-inch diameter branches.
- 2 Bypass blade loppers: up to 1.5-inch diameter branches (average).
- 3 Razor-tooth pruning saw, with 6- to 7-inch blade: ½- to 3-inch diameter branches.

Bypass style blades with a curved anvil make the cleanest cuts for trees and shrubs. Look for blades of hardened steel that will hold a sharp edge well. Anvil pruners with a straight blade and flat anvil crush the stem and don't make clean cuts; they are not suitable for making clean final cuts on trees and shrubs.

If you have to strain to make a cut, it can be injurious to the plant and the gardener. Use a larger size pruning head or a saw if the tool in hand doesn't cut easily.

Additional helpful tools for different plant or garden types.

Choose bypass blades for these tools as well.

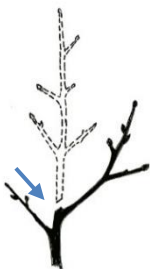
- Long-arm (extension) hand pruner for vines and small trees.
- Larger sized lopper heads and hand saws for larger diameter branches.
- Pole pruners –separate pruning and saw heads are easiest to work with.
- Hedge shears for hedges, spring heath, and woody herbs like lavender and santolina.

Keep your tools clean and sharp.

- Clean blades with a wire brush, steel wool, or a scrubby sponge. Waterless hand cleaners are helpful for removing sticky sap from saw teeth.
- After cleaning, spray with light oil or WD-40 to deter rust.
- Put tools away clean and dry.
- Maintain sharpness of pruner and lopper blades with a carbide sharpener, sharpening stone, or fine file.

Use selective pruning cuts placed at natural points of branch attachment.

Reduction Cut



Cut above a lateral branch of similar diameter. That branch will now be the leader.

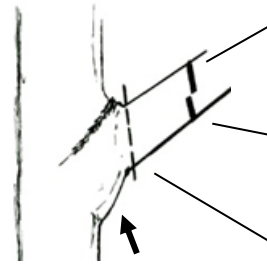
Branch Removal Cut



Place the cut where the lateral branch is attached to the main stem. Don't leave a stub.

3-part Branch Removal Cut at the Branch Collar

Use this saw cut method to prevent tearing the bark on the main stem of trees and tree-like shrubs.



2- Top cut over or outside of the undercut to remove the branch.

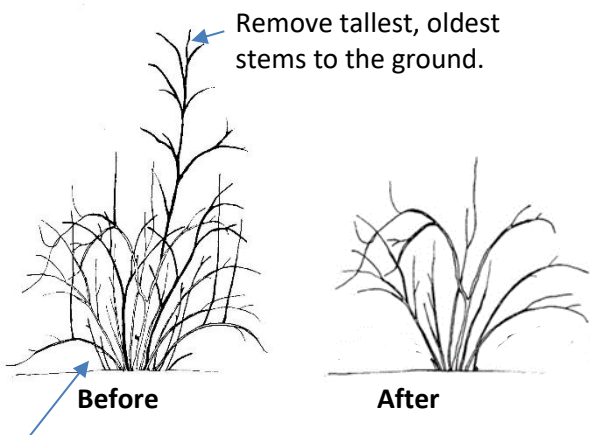
1- Undercut first, going in 1/3 of the way. This prevents bark from tearing back to the

3- Finish cut outside the branch collar, cut up from the bottom.

Branch collar

Heading cuts shorten stems to a bud or to a random point on the stem without regard to the position of lateral branches. These cuts are best for plants like vines, roses, woody herbs and certain shrubs that are cut back to a low framework. Avoid heading cuts for general shrub maintenance and tree pruning.

Multi-stem Shrubs



Remove tallest, oldest stems to the ground.

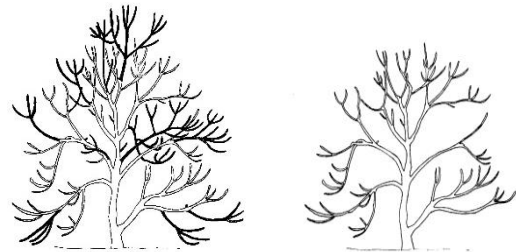
Before

After

Remove or dig up stems at outer edges to reduce width.

No cuts needed on the smaller remaining stems.

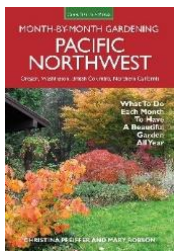
Tree-like Shrubs



Before

After

Use branch removal and reduction cuts to maintain natural structure and branch taper.



Pacific Northwest Month-by-Month Gardening by Christina Pfeiffer with Mary Robson. Cool Springs Press

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