

The What, When and How of Pruning

Why prune? 5 good reasons

- Remove dead wood to support plant health
 - Create safe, structurally sound specimens
 - Enhance a plant's ornamental qualities or train to pleasing shapes
 - Stimulate vigorous growth (hedges)
 - Enhance flowering and fruiting
- Never prune without a good reason!

Tools



Use the right tool for the job. Keep WD40 and a sharpener on hand. Keep tools clean, oiled and sharp.

Safety

- Protect your eyes & ears. Close proximity to falling or poking branches can be dangerous. Be prepared.
- Wear protective clothing.
- Use the right ladder for the job, make sure you have level footing, and do not overreach.

When to prune?

- **Spring flowering trees & shrubs** set flowers on last year's growth. Prune right after flowers have finished bloom. Pruning in autumn will remove flower buds for the following spring.
- **Summer & fall flowering trees & shrubs** set bloom in this year's growth. Prune in early spring to encourage vigorous shoots and profuse flowering.

Print out Portland Nursery's Pruning Calendar for more detailed pruning times.

How to prune – basic rules

- Plan cuts carefully. Make a cut, step back & assess the next cut, repeat.
- Prune no more than 1/3 of the plant at a time. Plants need to photosynthesize & will replace lost leaves rapidly by producing watersprouts or suckers. Exceptions are roses or shrubs that can be pruned low to the ground in spring (willows, red twig dogwoods).
- No tree topping. Removing the head of a tree creates problems in the overall structure of the tree. Thinning the tree over time or removing the tree all-together are usually better options.

Proper Cutting Techniques

Small Branches

- Good cuts are about 1/4" above a growth-bud or branch & made at an angle facing **away** from the bud.
- Cutting too close to a bud damages the bud; cutting too far away leaves a bit of stem to rot on the plant.



Large Branches

Words to know:

Branch collar – Where a branch attaches to the trunk or another large branch, there is an area of raised bark that contains the materials the plant needs to heal after the cut.

This area should stay intact. Cuts should be made parallel to the branch that is remaining, just above the branch collar. Cutting too close will inhibit healing after the cut.



Branch collar



Large Branch Cutting

1. Make a small undercut about 2" away from the trunk.
2. Make a cut on top of the branch near the first cut, but farther away from the trunk.
3. Remove the rest of the branch.
4. Make a clean cut outside of the branch collar.

Note: this process may have to be started closer to the tip of a large branch and repeated closer to the trunk to reduce weight on branches.

Five Types of Pruning Cuts

- **Thinning** – remove branches back to a point of origin or junction with another branch. This lets you reduce the bulk of the plant & causes minimal regrowth.
- **Heading** – remove just part of a stem or branch. This stimulates lateral growth just below the cut and causes new growth to be fuller. It can cause plants to be heavier at the tips.
- **Deadheading** is removing spent flowers to encourage new flowers to form or to clean up the overall look of the plant.
- **Shearing** – indiscriminate cuts for shape. Used commonly when pruning hedges.
- **Pinching** – pinching off the terminal bud (bud at the tip of a stem) to create a fuller plant. Used mostly in annuals & perennials.