

# Pruning of Flowering Shrubs

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- Shrubs add wide variety of shape, colour, texture and heights to a garden.
- Provide a beautiful mid-story design element in the garden
- Gracefully transitions from the low growing understory plantings to larger upper story elements such as trees or buildings.
- Individual shrubs can be used as specimen plant focal points
- Grouping shrubs into a hedge or border formation can define boundaries or direct interest and flow.
- Hardy, disease resistant shrubs suited to the growing conditions establish quickly and with a little effort are easy to maintain.
- Understanding growth habit and appropriate pruning is key to maintaining the size, shape, health and beauty of your shrubs.

## Why Prune

Pruning is necessary to:

- Remove dead damaged branches
- Control size and shape
- Encourage new growth
- Promote flowering and fruit production
- Rejuvenate old shrubs

## When to Prune

- Most newly planted shrubs do not require pruning for the first three years
- Once established timing will depend on the growth habit of the shrub.
- Growth habit includes the yearly rate of growth, time of the growing season that the shrub flowers and sets buds for the next years flowering and whether the flowers develop on “old” (previous year’s growth) or “new” wood (current year’s growth).
- A general principal of pruning is to prune immediately after flowering or during the shrubs dormant period during the late winter for summer blooming shrubs.

## Spring Flowering Shrubs

- Shrubs that bloom in the spring develop their flowers on “old wood” during the previous summer.

- Prune immediately after the spring flowering and before the plant begins to set the buds for the next bloom period.
- Pruning of spring flowering shrubs (e.g. forsythia, flowering almond or azalea) later in the summer removes the buds and next season's flowering will be greatly reduced.

### **Summer Flowering Shrubs**

- Shrubs that bloom throughout the summer (e.g. spirea, butterfly bush and rose of Sharon) bloom most profusely on the current year's growth (new wood)
- May be pruned any time after blooming to encourage a second flowering
- Should be pruned again while dormant in late winter or early spring to encourage new growth needed for summer flowering
- Mature flowering shrubs benefit from a more substantial pruning every two to three years to maintain the plant's health and vigor and enhances its appearance.

### **How to Prune**

- Begin with the appropriate clean, sharp tools
- Disinfect your tools after each plant is pruned to reduce any risk of spreading disease.

#### **Step 1: Pruning Old Wood**

- Remove any dead or diseased wood
- Select two to four of the oldest, largest stems, equally spaced around the shrub
- When removing old stems, make the cut as close to the base of the stem as possible.

#### **Step 2: Pruning of Younger Stems & Suckers**

- Remove any branches that are crossing or rubbing against each other
- Prune stems that look out of place or are crowding the centre of the plant
- Aim to leave a balanced variety of old and new, big and small stems.

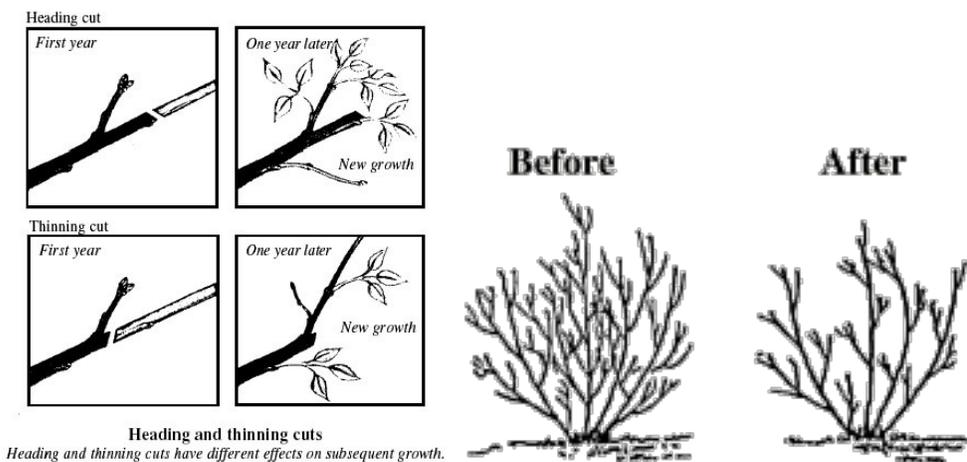
#### **Step 3: Heading Back Overgrown Stems**

- To head back a stem that's too long, make the cut just above a bud that is facing in the direction you want the new growth to go—usually toward the outside of the plant
- Helps keep the centre of the shrub open - important for good air circulation and more natural appearance
- If the plant has opposite leaves and one bud is facing in the wrong direction, simply rub it off to prevent new growth in that direction

- Do not leave stem stubs above the buds - they will die and risk disease.

### Pruning Cuts

- Two basic types of pruning cuts: heading cuts, and thinning cuts
- Heading cuts stimulate growth of buds closest to the wound
- Direction in which the top remaining bud is pointing determines direction of new growth
- Make heading cuts selectively to reduce shrub height and retain natural form
- Non-selective heading cuts made indiscriminately will stimulate rapid, vigorous regrowth from buds below the cut leading to bushy, unattractive shrubs
- Non-selective heading cuts are only justifiable when using hedge clippers on a hedge or topiaried shrub
- Thinning cuts remove branches at their points of origin or attachment
- Used in moderation, thinning cuts reduce shrub density without stimulating regrowth.



### Resources

With the huge number of shrub varieties and differing growth habits it is best to research your shrub and learn about its individual pruning requirements. The following Internet sites provide good basic information:

<http://landscapeontario.com/pruning-shrubs--evergreens>

[http://landscaping.about.com/od/shrubcare/p/pruning\\_shrubs.htm](http://landscaping.about.com/od/shrubcare/p/pruning_shrubs.htm)

[http://www.savvygardener.com/Features/pruning\\_shrubs.htm](http://www.savvygardener.com/Features/pruning_shrubs.htm)

Consulting with your local garden centre or Master Gardener's group can also provide valuable information and pruning tips.

