

WHY PRUNE A DECIDUOUS SHRUB?

Why prune a deciduous shrub? Deciduous shrubs require regular pruning to produce the best flowers, fruit and foliage. It is a simple procedure if a few basic rules are followed.

They may be pruned at two different times of the year. Late winter or early spring, or after flowering. The exception to this is pruning to remove dead, diseased and broken parts of the shrub when you notice them, regardless of the time of year.

Early-flowering shrubs (those that bloom in March, April, May and early June) are pruned immediately after flowering. Among these are common lilac, weigela, forsythia, mock orange, quince, deutzia, cranberry bush, and tree viburnum.

Late flowering shrubs (those that bloom in late June, July or August) are pruned in late winter or early spring (late February, March or early April). Included in this group are calicarpa (beautyberry), rose of Sharon, buddleia (butterfly bush), and crape myrtle.

How should they be pruned? Cut out the dead, diseased or damaged branches. Cut back into healthy wood below the injury or disease at the base of the plant. A dead or injured branch offers an opportunity for insects and rot organisms to enter. Cut back wayward or overgrown stems. Remove about one-third of the total number of overgrown stems. Cut back to base of plant all branches that cross or rub against each other. Remove about one-third of all old mature stems at ground level. Remove all withered flower clusters unless fruit is desired. Cut back to nearest bud.

Try to maintain the natural shape of the plant. Shrubs are pruned, not sheared like hedges or poodles. It is important not to take more than one-third of the plant at any one time. This can spoil the appearance of a shrub for a long time. Try not to remove all shoots at the same height. This will make the plant flat on top. Avoid removing the new shoots at the base of the plant unless you want to limit the size of the plant.

Hydrangeas are usually a source of confusion. There are several types of hydrangea and they are pruned differently. *H. macrophylla* or *H. hortensis* are pruned after flowering to remove old canes. Cut flowering stems back to unflowered laterals. 'Hills of Snow' hydrangea should have their seed pods and 2-year-old wood removed. Cut back 1-year-old wood to a few eyes.

Happy Pruning!

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