

Garden Art

By Priscilla Feld

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Transform your pruning debris into beautiful garden creations.

Pruning your trees to encourage new shapes and healthy growth creates a mountain of limbs, so why not create something beautiful with them? Spring is a great time to let your imagination soar.

Here's what you'll need to pull it off: hammer, clippers, pliers, gloves, flexible wire (preferably one that rusts), nails (drywall type, 1¼–1½ in.; small nails, 7/8 in.), and imagination.

Living fences: Willow cuttings are perfect for creating living structures. To construct a fence, take a cutting and stick it in the ground about 4 inches deep. Be sure there is a bud showing above ground. Stagger the plantings 4–6 inches apart. When summer arrives, the cuttings should take off. During winter you can prune them to the height you want and replant the cuttings to fill in gaps, or to create more fencing.

Plant supports: Tree clippings, wisteria vine, willow or similar material will work. Make a teepee with the sticks and use the wisteria to lace them together. If you don't have wisteria, you can use very thin willow or wire.



Garden art doesn't have to be serious. This fanciful ball was made from willow prunings. Photo by Jeff Feld.

Playful art: Make a ball of tree clippings. Use the wire to hold the initial cuttings in place. Add pieces until the ball takes shape and becomes rigid. Let the ball blow around the yard. It's fun to watch, and a surprise for the kids when they go outside.

Create a sculpture: Use a limb with an interesting shape as a base for found objects. Hang pieces of beach glass, rocks, a blown-down bird nest, a wind chime. Be fanciful.

The idea of creating yard art is to look at your materials in a different way. Instead of burning your pruning, recycle it into something that is all your own. Have fun!

Function first

If you're more into function than form, consider building a useful trellis from your pruning leftovers.

Alder makes a good trellis. It will rot in a few years, but in our area it is so prolific that I think it makes a good material for impermanent structures. Willow and cedar limbs will last much longer, so use them if available.

Trellis designs are based on one basic shape: rectangle. Draw a picture of what you want the trellis to look like. The instructions that follow are for a trellis with a finished height of 7–8 feet.

Wood materials:	Number	Length	Diameter
Side uprights	2	12–14 ft.	1¾ in. at largest end
Cross pieces	4	3 ft.	1¾ in.
Center upright	1	7–8 ft.	1½ in.
Decorative pieces	4 or 5	6 ft.	thumb size

Gather your materials when you're ready to start the project, they'll be more flexible. Always cut a little extra, just in case a piece breaks.



(Left) Fashioned from pruning waste, this beautiful and functional trellis provides support for a clematis. (Below) Larger pruning leftovers can be used to create rustic and durable arches like this one. Photos by Jeff Feld.



Construction: Lay out the side uprights parallel to each other, about 2 feet apart. Place a crosspiece across the 2 uprights, about 16 inches from the ends of the uprights. Center the piece so about 10 in. extends beyond each side. Nail it in place.

Lay the second crosspiece across the uprights, about 40–45 in. above the lower crosspiece. Nail in place. With piers and wire, secure the 4 nailed joints. Cut a piece of wire 6 in. long and go around the joint, catching both pieces of wood. Twist and cut the wire.

Creating the arch: Bend the uprights so the tips overlap about 12 in. Wire them together.

Center upright: With the trellis lying flat, place the center upright in the middle, with about 6 in. of the thicker end extending below the bottom crosspiece. Nail the upright at each crosspiece. Don't nail into the arch. Instead, wire the joint where the crosspiece crosses the arch. Later you will trim it.

Additional crosspieces: Place one piece about 6 in. above the lower one. Alternate the thick end. Nail it to the crosspieces and wire the joints. Position the last crosspiece 6 in. below the upper crosspiece. Nail and wire.

Decorative pieces: Cut a piece long enough to fit diagonally across one of the rectangles formed by the 2 bottom crosspieces and the upright. Nail in place. Cut another piece of equal length from the same branch. Place it across the previous piece to form an X. Nail. Repeat the process of the other side of the center upright.

Creating the fan: Cut 2 pieces about 3 ft. long. Position the bottom of one end at the intersection of the top crosspiece and the upright, with the limb extending up at a 45 degree angle across one side of the arch. Nail. Repeat on the other side. Nail and wire. Don't nail to the arch.

Trimming: Trim the fan pieces and center upright to leave about 12 in. beyond the arch.

Securing the trellis in the ground: Metal posts are the most resistant to wind. For a 7–8 ft. trellis, use a 36- or 48-in. post driven into the ground so the metal plate is just below ground level. Wire the trellis to the post.