

PRUNING GUIDELINES

One of a gardener's most frequent jobs year-round is pruning. Besides being good for the plants, when done correctly it can be a very therapeutic activity.

Some general rules to follow are:

1. NEVER top an ornamental tree and be very wary of using any arborist or gardening company that advertises topping trees.
2. Always cut out dead parts of a plant regardless of the time of year.
3. Always use clean, sharp pruning tools.
4. Always stand back and look often while you prune. Walk around – remember, less is more.

PRUNING CUTS

There are two basic types of pruning cuts that a gardener uses:

1. Heading cut – shearing, or hedge pruning, topping and pinching are heading cuts.
2. Thinning cut – most usual type of pruning. When in doubt, use this method.

Heading cut

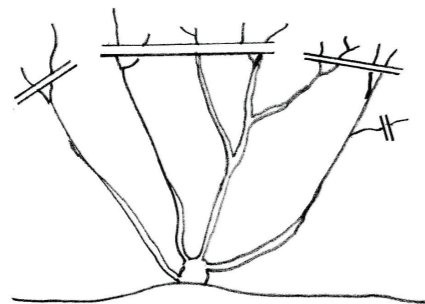
This involves cutting the tip or end of a branch, stem or twig. When you cut the tips you cause the plant to produce growth hormone in the spring, causing the plant to become bushier. This is good for hedges, chrysanthemums, herbs like basil, rosemary and thyme, but not most shrubs and trees.

Thinning cut

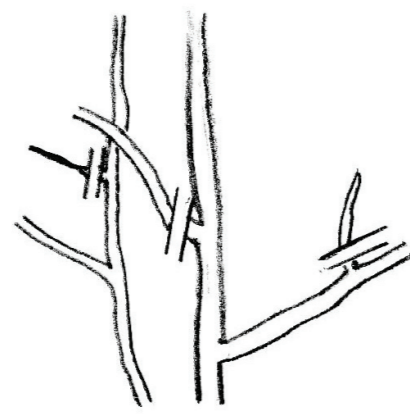
This involves taking a whole branch, twig or stem off or even cutting the plant back to the ground. This stimulates new growth and allows light and air into the center of the plant, which promotes disease resistance. It also promotes new green growth within the plant which allows you to cut back the plant if it becomes too big for the space.



Front cover:
Clematis armandii
PHOTO: Vic Bentley



Heading Cut



Thinning Cut

HEDGE PRUNING

There are two main kinds of hedging:

1. Shrubs and trees which have been planted in a row to form a screen or windbreak.

When using these for a hedge you should try to keep the natural shape of the plant, head back for density and remove any broken, dead or diseased branches.

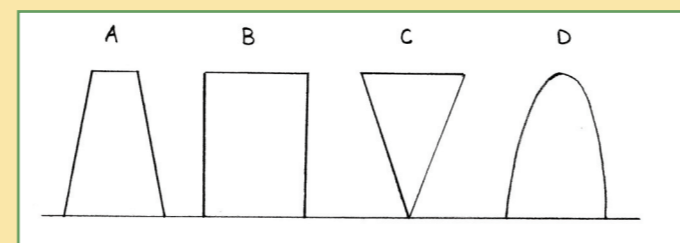
2. Formal hedging like privet, boxwood and Japanese barberry which are happy to be close cut or sheared. Other examples are photinia, pyracantha, yew and laurel.

With a newly planted hedge you should begin shearing as soon as there is noticeable growth, even if you eventually want it to be a tall hedge. Trimming small amounts of new growth several times, each time with the plants a little taller, will allow the hedge to grow larger gradually while it becomes a bushier, tighter hedge.

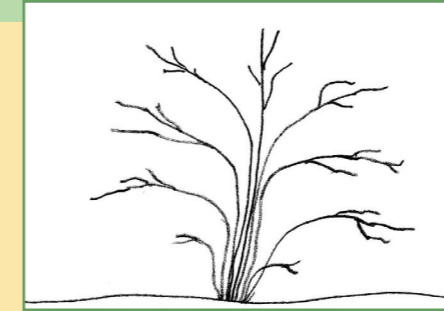
Once the hedge is mature it should be trimmed when it's growing the fastest.

Needle evergreens like hemlock grow early in the season so they usually need one spring trimming after the new growth.

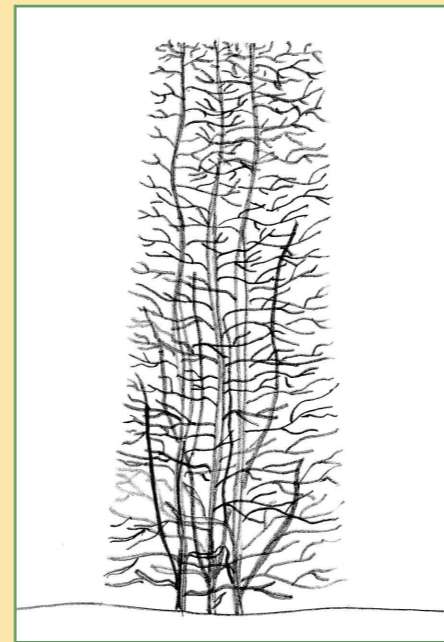
Broadleaf evergreens like boxwood grow throughout the warmer seasons and may need to be trimmed several times as new growth emerges. Try not to trim boxwood when it's very hot and sunny, as the exposed new growth tends to be burnt.



Hedge A will be healthier than B and C, and where it snows you may need to shape like D.



Hedging 1



Hedging 2

TREES AND TREE-LIKE PLANTS

The most important thing with trees and tree-like plants is to plant them in the right place so that they can be left to grow to their natural mature size and shape. Examples of tree-like plants are pieris, camellias, rhododendrons and lilac. Prune out dead wood. Fix growth problems slowly over 3–5 years, removing no more than 1/8th total leaf surface in any one year. Pruning is best done in late winter when the tree is dormant. If necessary remove suckers, any large crossing and touching branches and any double leaders. Take time, stand back and look frequently between cuts – remember, less is more.

Fruit trees

Pruning of these trees annually is a must for good fruit production. Prune to develop strong, well-spaced branches that can handle heavy loads of ripe fruit.

There are three generally recognized forms for fruit trees:

Central leader – often used for apples and pears. It encourages one main trunk and strong side branches.

Modified leader – Many fruit trees naturally grow this way and it is usually recommended for cherries and plums.

Open vase – Works well for peaches, nectarines and apricots. This method opens up the center of the tree to let light in. It is important to space out the principal limbs over as much trunk area as possible.

Cane growers

Plants that renew themselves by sending up new branches called canes from the base. Forsythias, roses, bamboo, kerria, weigela are very tough plants. After removing dead wood, crossing branches, cut 1/3rd to 1/8th of the biggest, thinnest, weakest and oldest stems. Do this every year to keep the size controlled. Generally prune to open the center. Tidy up with thinning cuts. Cut back anything hanging to the ground and cut to a side branch or bud.

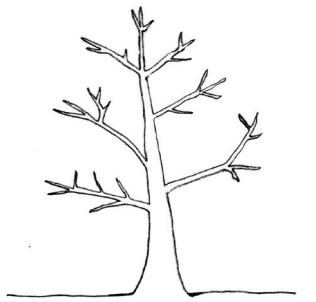
Low-growing mounding plants

These are various perennials and shrubs, e.g. acuba, spireas, hebes, lavender, heather. Many plants like these do not need much pruning as you want them to grow to their natural size and shape. Where you need to tidy a plant up, Cass Turnbull's "grab and snip" method is a good one. Find the long branch(es) that are spoiling the natural shape of the plant, grab and follow this branch into the center of the plant. Prune off the branch from a few to 30 cm below the top surface. Try to cut to a bud or side branch where possible. Then stand back and look before doing more pruning.

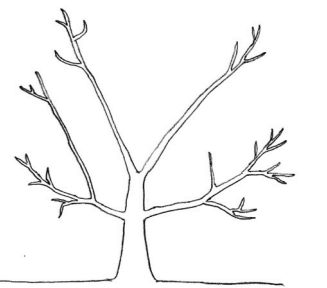
Shrubs

While some shrubs are grown for their appearance and tend to have insignificant flowers, others are grown for their stunning flowers. Different species flower at differing times during the season and all are best pruned after they flower rather than before – or you may cut off all the buds! Check in good gardening books like Botanica or the Western Gardener to see if the plant flowers on current or previous year's growth. For example, hydrangeas bloom on the previous year's growth so you would only prune off the current year's flowering canes at the base and possibly thin out some of the new growth, but NOT trim off the tops of every cane.

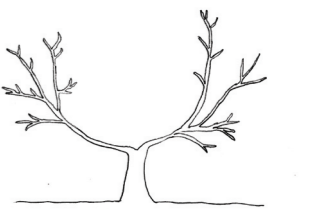
Most roses bloom on wood that is no more than two years old and are pruned back hard in late winter/early spring after the last frost. You will find a great deal of contradictory advice about pruning roses but one thing which seems to be agreed is to keep roses young by cutting back old, non-productive canes.



Central Leader



Modified Leader



Open vase

CLIMBERS

Grape vines respond well to pruning. Prune while the vines are dormant, usually in late winter. You need to keep some of the one-year-old wood from which fruit-bearing shoots will develop. Remove the old fruiting wood and thinnest, weakest shoots that grew the previous season. Thin the previous season's growth, continuing to remove the less vigorous wood until only about 50 buds remain. If the climber is a strong growing variety, e.g. *Clematis armandii*, leave an additional 10 buds (approx) for each half-kg (1 lb.) of prunings.

Most flowering climbers bloom on wood formed the previous year so any minor pruning should be done after flowering but wait until winter for more drastic pruning. For Clematis, make sure you know which type it is and prune according to the recommendations for that type. There are many useful books on Clematis pruning, including the Clearview Guide (Wein et al., 2001) and Cass Turnbull's "Guide to Pruning".

BERRIES

Raspberries, blackberries and blueberries bear fruit on canes that grew the preceding year. Prune off older canes at the base while dormant. Encourage side branches by pinching out new canes that reach 1 m (3 ft) high and spring-prune side branches to about 40 cm (18 in.).

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Master Gardeners

Association of British Columbia

The Master Gardeners Association of British Columbia is a volunteer organization providing information about gardening and horticulture to the community and educating people about environmentally responsible gardening practices.

Through its chapters in Vancouver, Victoria, Summerland, Vancouver Island and Prince George, the MGABC

- runs a series of clinics at garden centers and major garden events
- presents gardening programmes in schools, hospitals and seniors' homes
- works with community groups on various "greening" projects.

Most of the 700 Master Gardeners in BC are enthusiastic amateurs; some are experienced professionals — all of us have a passion for gardening. We share this passion with the public and promote the enjoyment of gardening through a variety of volunteer projects and activities.

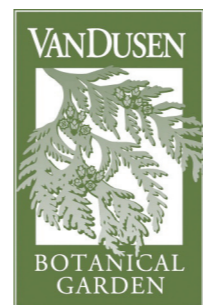
For further information, or for an application form to join one of our groups, go to our website: www.bcmastergardeners.org

Contact us at:
Master Gardeners, 5251 Oak Street
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Telephone messages: 604-257-8662
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