

Shrub Pruning Simplified

Pruning is the selective removal of certain parts of a plant.

Many shrubs don't need to be pruned. With careful planning and choice of plants, a garden can grow and develop over a long period of time, with little or no pruning.

Most shrubs will not require pruning within their first 3 years of planting.

However, once established, most shrubs will benefit from an occasional tidy up to prevent them from becoming too big and/or too congested with aging, damaged, diseased or dead woody material.

This 'cleansing' is good practice to ensure good air circulation in and around the shrub discouraging any natural build up of diseases and pests. Furthermore, correct pruning can support shrubs to flower and berry more prolifically and enjoy a longer lifespan.



Evergreen Shrubs are branched, woody plants that hold onto their leaves all year round

Generally they require next to no pruning, just a trim to keep any wayward branches in check. If an evergreen shrub has become unruly prune in Spring to get it back into a preferable shape. See 'Short Back and Sides' below.

During the following year, it will regain its composure.

Warning: Any shrubs with more than a 1/3 of dead and/or damaged branches and most conifers will not respond well to this treatment. It might be time for their replacement if they have outgrown their space.

Deciduous Shrubs are branched, woody plants that drop their leaves in the autumn and produce fresh leaves the following spring and are generally grown for their show of flowers.

With the aim of encouraging flowering, this factsheet categorises deciduous shrubs according to when they flower and how you can prune them. I learned this relatively simple way of remembering 3 methods of deciduous shrub pruning from a great teacher a while back, and it has stuck with me since! The 3 methods are Short Back and Sides, Open Heart Surgery and Cruel to be Kind.

Short Back and Sides

- ◇ Late autumn and winter flowering deciduous shrubs need little pruning except to keep them shapely and healthy
- ◇ Carry out this pruning in early/mid Spring, after the shrubs have flowered, avoiding a time during severe weather
- ◇ Employ the '4 D's' of pruning—remove any dead, dying, diseased or damaged branches from the plant
- ◇ Further cuts might include the removal of any crossing/rubbing branches that would otherwise result in one of the branches eventually falling foul of some form of damage
- ◇ Common examples include *Hammamelis* (witch hazel), *Euonymus* and *Viburnum*

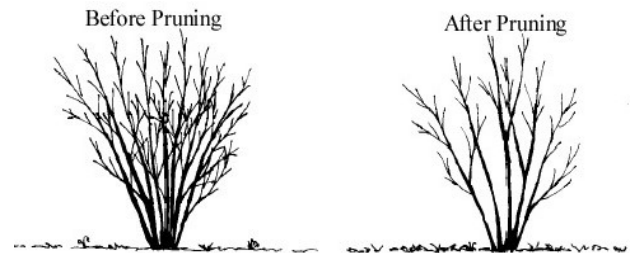


Short Back and Sides

Shrub Pruning Simplified *contd*

Open Heart Surgery

- ◇ **Deciduous shrubs that fall into this category flower on the previous year's growth** i.e. the woody stems that develop following flowering in year 1, produce the flower buds that flower in year 2

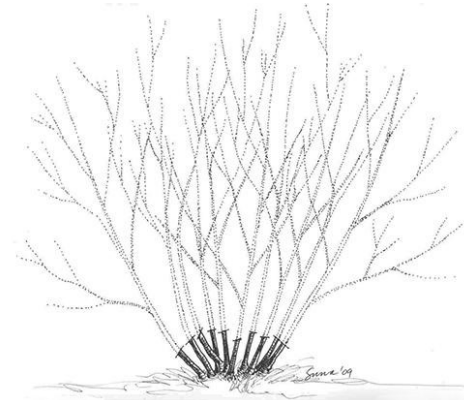


Open Heart Surgery

- ◇ Many of these are early flowering shrubs (flower from spring through to mid summer) and are pruned as soon as their flowers have faded. Prune down a third of the recently flowered shoots, and if it is an older plant and/or becoming congested in the central area of the shrub, prune up to a third of the older woodier stems almost to ground level
- ◇ This gives the shrub a long summer period and into early autumn to produce new shoots that will age and be frost hardy for the approaching winter and in turn be ready to produce flowers on these new stems the following late Spring/early Summer
- ◇ Examples include *Berberis* (barberry) and *Forsythia*

Cruel to be Kind

- ◇ **Typically, shrubs that flower in the late summer/early autumn produce flowers on the current season's stem growth**
- ◇ These shrubs can be pruned fairly close to the ground/within 2 cm of their current season's growth during favourable weather in the winter months, but generally late winter/no later than March
- ◇ Pruning does not have to be as severe as suggested in the picture. Stems can be left at a height from which you would like the shrub to continue to grow from. However, flowers generally will only be produced on any current season's growth and lower /older limbs will remain woody and fairly unsightly—but this is a personal preference
- ◇ Examples include *Cornus* (coloured dogwood), *Buddleja* (butterfly bush) and *Lavandula* (lavender)



Cruel to be Kind

Top Tips

- ◇ **Always use sharp secateurs and loppers.** Use secateurs for stems up to your small finger's circumference and loppers for anything greater in size. Clean tools free of debris after use; WD40 will help shift anything 'stuck on'.
- ◇ **When pruning diseased plant material,** always clean with Jeyes Fluid in between cuts and before new plants. Diseased pruning material should be removed from the garden area, with the remaining larger pieces shredded and used as a garden mulch. The twiggy stems can be added to the compost heap.