



Quick Guide To Garden Pruning And Grooming



Skip Batchelder



About The Author



Through my many years, I have perfected my gardening skills and expanded my knowledge and experience as a gardening instructor, speaker, author, certified nursery consultant, and most recently blogger.

I was introduced to gardening at the very early age of 8. I lived across the street from a man who gardened his little slice of heaven on about 5 acres of semi-rural property in No. California. Mr. May had everything from honeybees to an orchard, and was very accommodating to the little boy from across the street. I spent hours shadowing Mr. May around his place, asking questions, making mental notes and scurrying across the street to try my hand in my parent's anemic yard. Eventually I got so good at applying Mr. May's know-how that I won the consent of my Mother to tend her flower beds; and my Dad gave me a vegetable garden plot in the corner of our backyard. I didn't know then that I was attracted to the science of the whole thing, but I could see the results and was very proud of the increase in blooms for my Mom, and the vegetable production that even I could appreciate as abundant. I was hooked.

High school and college left little time or opportunity to get in the dirt. But, I was rewarded and further encouraged by my zoology and botany classes and next tried my hand at tending a garden underneath the high porch and stairs of our apartment in No. New Jersey. It all came back to me and when we finally had our first home I had my first garden plot as an adult. Some early setbacks and a hankering to be more at-one with the earth, led me to the disciplines and sacrifices of French Bio-Intensive Organic Gardening. Yeah, I wore wing tips to work, but I had Berkenstocks in my heart as a young man in the late 70s.

Today, I live on a "rock" in Rocklin, CA and my active gardening is restricted to raised beds (even my lawn is a raised bed) and patio containers. But, I do keep up with the latest trends in gardening, the irreversible encroachment of the Government on our garden culture; and most importantly, those new to the pleasures of gardening. As a nursery consultant in the Garden Center of the world's leading home improvement store chain, I have even gained a faithful following of young adults with first home responsibilities and opportunities: and retired men and women who now have the time, focus, and inclination to finally develop a better understanding of gardening and hopes for its rewards.



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Introduction



Pruning is a general term used by gardeners to describe that activity which helps them to bring symmetry, increased or concentrated blooming, and overall health to many plants in their yard or garden.

This activity can be performed on a regular schedule, or an as needed basis - depending on the need to prune. These pruning activities are commonly divided into these main categories of cuts:

Structural Pruning - Individual cuts to shorten or thin out stems and branches.

Shearing - Groups of cuts made to shear an edge to give overall plant form.

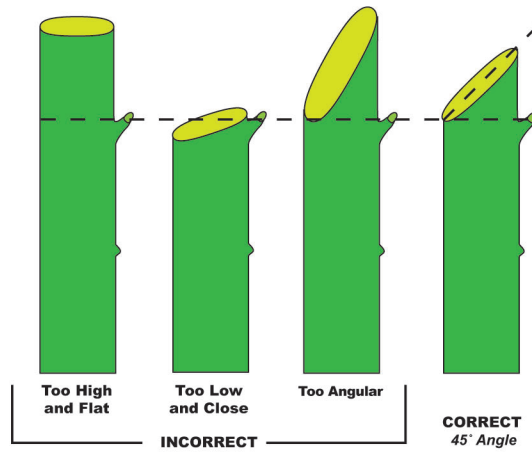
Dead Heading - Trimming of expired blooms before they can set to seed.

Each of these pruning activities requires basic knowledge of why the cuts need to be performed and how they are to be made so as not to endanger the plant.

This QuickGuide will give you confidence in knowing when, where, and how to care for your plants through proper pruning methods. Properly pruned, each will give you better performance, increase abundance, and less problems in your garden.

Proper Pruning Cuts

When you prune is important. Equally important is WHERE and HOW you prune a stem or branch. For some plants it is not so critical, say for a Boxwood. However, for something as definitive as a rose bush stem (often called a cane) it can be vital. Let's take these four rose bush canes for example. On the left, our pruner has made a FLAT cut well above the outward pointing new growth BUD. This is a poor cut for several reasons. First, it is too high, leaving an unsightly STUB at the end of the cane. More importantly this flat cut allows for moisture of any kind to rest on the cut. This moisture can encourage a fungal infection on the end of that cane.

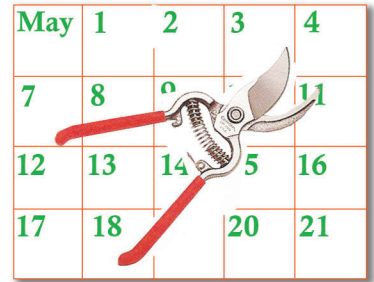


In the next cut the angle is improved slightly, but the cut is too close to the bud. In the third cut the angle is exaggerated, but again this results in too much stem remaining above the cut. The final cut is near perfect. The cut is at a 45° angle, perfect for shedding moisture. And, the top of the cut is as high from the bud as the cut is wide. Just enough space (typically 1/4 in.) allowing the new bud to grow undisturbed, or endangered from a poor cut.

To Paint, or Not To Paint

This is still a question often asked of The Garden Guy. For a very long time old timers religiously “painted” each cut with a gummy tar like substance often called “stem sealer “. In more recent times ordinary latex paint was advocated for the same ”protection”. Many still make the pilgrimage into their rose gardens with a can of sealer in hand. More current research has revealed that these seals change shape or crack as the cane develops and the expanding/contracting of temperatures works on the seal. The result; the seal (if not tightly water proof,) tends to create an area on the cut that can actually harbor moisture and give shelter to a forming disease. For my money, I would rather put my faith in a proper cut and a plants ability to effectively scab over the cut. I save time and money in the process. But, to each his (or her) own !

The Proper Time To Prune



The most often misunderstood, and under appreciated, aspect of proper pruning is. . . **WHEN ?**

There are pruning activities, like deadheading roses, which take place with greater frequency during the blooming period. Deadheading will be addressed in detail later in this guide. For now, let's concentrate on the major pruning to be accomplished somewhere in the year's calendar.

Examples of seasonal pruning might include:

Azaleas - immediately after blooms fade (usually in mid-late Spring).

Chinese Fringe Flower - after spring bloom.

Escallonia - tolerates frequent sheering or pruning.

Euonymus - late Winter, early Spring, before new growth.

Euryops - prune in June

Hydrangea - late Winter or early Spring.

Nandena - late Winter.

Photinia - late Winter or early Spring before new growth appears.

Roses - late Fall, early Winter, before new growth appears.

While some, like the Wax Leaf Privet, could really care less when you elect to take the shears to it . . . others like Azaleas are almost guaranteed to disappoint you if you were careless enough to trim them even lightly in the Fall months. Why ? We grow and appreciated Azaleas for their majestic blooms. Very soon after these blooms fade, the Azalea is already forming the tiny buds for next season's rush of colorful flowers. So, if we make the mistake of pruning, or worse sheering, after buds have set, their elimination will result in Azalea shrubs with no " show " the following Spring.

CAUTION: Always try to prune NO MORE THAN 1/3 of any plant in a single season.

The Proper Pruning Tools



By-Pass Hand Pruner

Another part of Pruning that holds a lot of mystery for many people is which garden tool is used for what purpose, when, and how ! The Pruning Shear is one of the oldest mechanical devices known to modern gardeners. You could break off a branch, or twist out a stem. But, this “manhandling” of your prize plant would be, in addition to a lot of extra effort, likely to cause harm to your tree or shrub. Next, would be a sharp knife. A single blade wheeled with one hand while you hold the branch with the other -with no hand free to hold you on your ladder. So, some ingenious blacksmith perhaps fashioned a tool with two handles, each having a special purpose. The end of the first was forged as a “hook” on which would be held the branch or stem. The other handle end was forged into a blade with an edge honed to a razor sharp knife. The two were joined with a nut and bolt to keep them joined through their motion. Later a spring was added to conveniently return the pruning tool back to the open position after each cut. The result, and this is the key point, the sharpened blade makes a neat, smooth cut exactly where the hook holds the piece to be cut !



By-Pass Lopper Pruner

This tool proved so efficient and effective in offering precision cuts that another enterprising craftsman stretched out the handles, increased the blade and hook some, and fashioned what we know of today as the “lopper pruner”. This tool gives us considerably more reach and greater leverage in the application of force. The Lopper is the right tool for extending our influence over taller trees and shrubs and their deeper limb bases.

You might think that the lesson ends there. But no, there is an extra little bit of counseling first. Another tool maker thought it would be neat if the cutting blade crunched down on the branch or stem and mashed through to a small plate (the anvil) at the business end of the opposing handle. **BAD NEWS !** This Anvil Pruner is the bane of good garden practice. The crushing effect of the blade on the anvil tends to split green / live stems below the cut. These split ends are an open invitation to insects and diseases.



**Anvil Pruner ?
NO WAY says . . .**

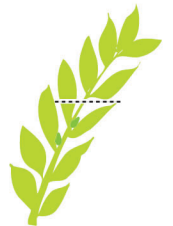
Pruning Back Overgrown Landscape

Recently, buyers of existing homes have encountered landscape trees and shrubbery that have often grown out of control. Any harmony they might have achieved at some point is now a patchwork of gangly limbs and too long stems. The stately refinements of a tidy privet hedge has lost all definition. And, what was once a beautifully balanced Crape Myrtle tree . . . is now a bush bloated by a tide of sucker branches sprouting up and down the “ trunk ”.

Before you get out your pruning sheers and saw, it might be wise to take stock of your landscape inventory. First, complete a survey identifying each individual plant - especially those that hold a key role in defining the style or form in landscaping around your house and yard. Careful identification is key to successfully recovering your existing landscape and a major contributor to the future plans for your yard.

In order to prune for **RECOVERY**, following these guidelines will help.

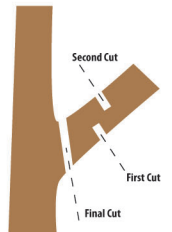
PRUNE BACK - try to keep at least two lateral (leaf) buds, the top most being one that points outwards.



SHEERING - try to shear off only enough growth to take shrubs or hedges back to its formed shape.



LIMB SAWING - always make an undercut **FIRST**, before sawing through a heavy limb to avoid stripping off a length of bark below the cut.



CAUTION !! If possible, avoid removing more than 1/3 of the total growth in any one season. This will preserve new flower buds; and permit the production of nutrients which are developed from the plant’s photosynthesis.

NOTE: *These severe prunings should be the last pruning you do for awhile so as to give plants the opportunity to bud and flower !*

If you are not sure in your identification, you are invited to share with The Garden Guy digital photos of the plants you can’t identify.

Wishing You Every Success

I hope you have found this
Quick Guide To Garden Pruning
valuable and inspiring.

Gardening is just one of the interests enjoyed by my league of faithful followers who have shared many of my experiences through one of my personally authored publications:

- WEBSITE skipsoutdoorliving.com
- BLOG skipsoutdoorliving.com/blog
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Better Outdoor Living With Every Visit !

is divided into these main areas of interest

**Yard and Garden
Outdoor Cooking
Patio Living**

