

Pruning Basics

Philosophy of Pruning Trees

A properly pruned tree looks as natural as possible; that is to say, the tree's appearance reflects its fundamental form and character. The pruner must be sensitive to maintaining this structural integrity, in addition to knowing a bit about tree biology and proper pruning principles!

Recommended Pruning Equipment

- Hand pruners (Felco or ARS type, bypass, not anvil type)
- long-handled loppers, 18-inch (Corona type, bypass, not anvil type)
- hand-saw, 12-16 inches; bottle of rubbing alcohol or 10:1 diluted bleach
- whetting stone/sharpener; oil
- file
- **safe** ladder (3-legged are best for uneven ground)
- pole pruner, 10-foot (optional)
- chain saw (optional)

Tree Pruning Priorities

1. Maintain health of tree: a) remove all dead, dying, and diseased limbs; b) remove crossovers, which can rub together and damage limbs and harbor disease; c) remove hazardous branches before they fall; d) correct and repair damage.
2. Raise the canopy to increase pedestrian, vehicular, or visual zone.
3. Rejuvenate the tree by the removal of old wood in such a way that encourages the formation of new wood (remove no more than 1/3 of the wood in one year).
4. Improve the aesthetic quality of the tree and thus, its value.
5. Slow the tree's growth by timely removal of foliage (but best to select right plant for the site).
6. Fruit trees: a) increase fruit production; b) develop strong 45-degree angles to support fruit load; c) remove limbs that grow down or straight up; d) maintain tree size (5-10' is ideal size for home orchard in terms of accessibility); e) maintain fruit spurs.

When to Prune Trees

The best time to prune trees is generally during the dormant period, usually in late winter (November–March). However pruning can be done year-round, as needed; for example, dead or diseased branches can be removed any time, the sooner the better. When pruning trees, keep this in mind: Pruning done during the dormant season tends to have an invigorating effect on tree growth. Pruning done during peak growth times tends to slow growth by removing leaves that manufacture nourishment, but too much summer pruning can damage a tree. Pruning during the spring (post-dormancy) and fall (pre-dormancy) is generally the least desirable time as the plant is most vulnerable during those times.

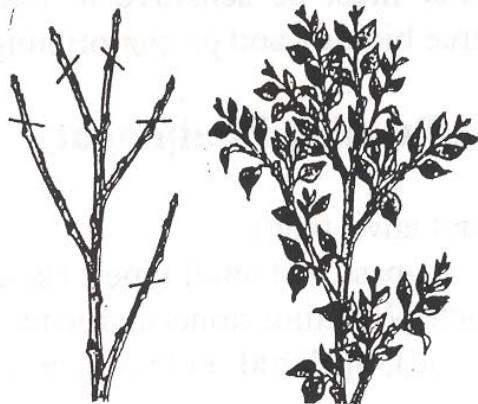
Generally, berries and tree fruits are pruned November until bloom; prune blooming ornamentals during and immediately after bloom.

Sooner rather than later: When you cut away part of a plant, a wound is left, susceptible to pests and diseases. To avoid trouble always prune so as to make small wounds, rather than large ones. Removing a bud or twig produces a smaller wound than waiting until it is a large limb! Rubbing off a sucker bud leaves a smaller wound than if you wait until it has a year's growth or more!

Types of Pruning Cuts

Heading vs. Thinning Cuts (reprinted from *All About Growing Fruits, Nuts, and Berries*, (Ortho))

A tree's response to a pruning cut depends on where on the branch the cut is made. Both types of cuts are used in pruning fruit trees and grapes.



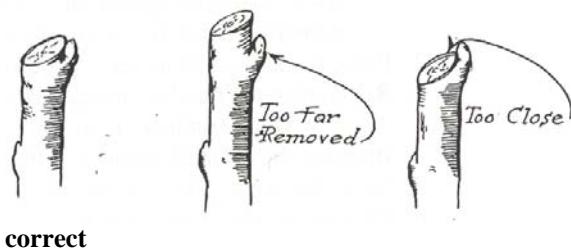
Heading Cuts: Several buds left on the cut branch grow, making denser, more compact foliage on more branches.



Thinning Cuts: Branches are removed entirely, leaving no buds to grow. Their energy is diverted into remaining branches, which grow more vigorously.

Angle of Cuts

Always make cuts close to a node. Branches grow only at these nodes, and if you leave too long a stub beyond the node, the stub will die and rot. (See diagram to right.)



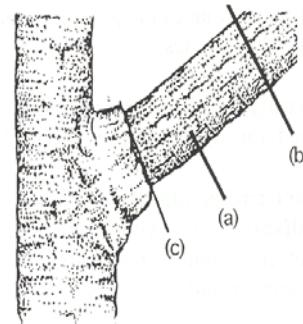
Placement of Cuts

Prune to the lateral bud that will produce the branch you want. The placement of that bud on the stem points the direction of the new branch. An outside bud, pruned with a slanting cut just above the bud, will usually produce an outside branch. A flat cut above the bud allows two lower buds to release and grow shots. (See diagram to right.)



Pruning Thick, Heavy Branches

1. Undercut the bottom of the branch about 1/3 of the way through, 6-12 inches out from the trunk (a).
2. Make a second cut from the top, about 2-inches farther out from the under-cut, until the branch falls away (b).
3. Cut back the resulting stub to the branch collar (c) (**not** flush with the trunk).



Anatomy of a Fruit Tree

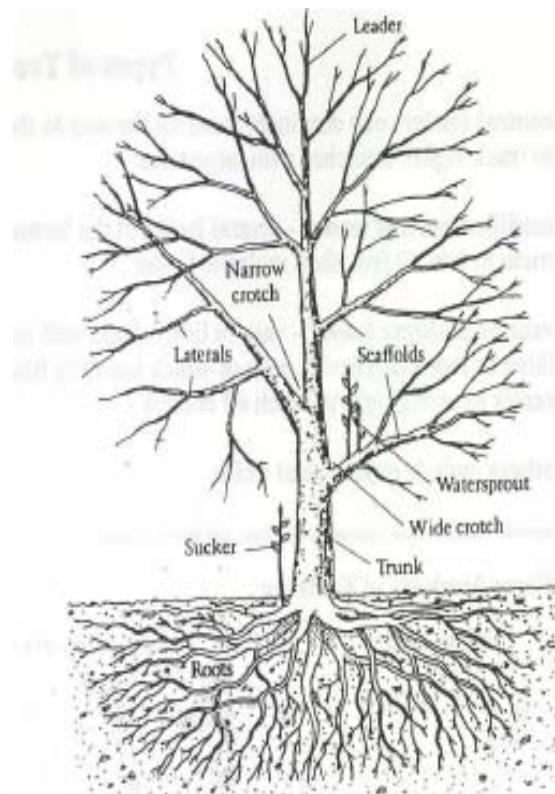
Reprinted from *All About Growing Fruits, Nuts, and Berries*
(Ortho)

Crotch: The angle where branches fork, or where a main limb joins the trunk. Strong crotches are wide angled, 45 degree; weak crotches are narrow.

Scaffold: The main limbs branching from the trunk.

Watersprout: A very vigorous shoot from a dormant bud on a branch. Remove by cutting.

Sucker: A vigorous shoot from the roots or from below the bud union. Cut off at the base. [To remove dig out soil around sucker, clip the sucker off and leave cut exposed to air.]



Parts of the Branch

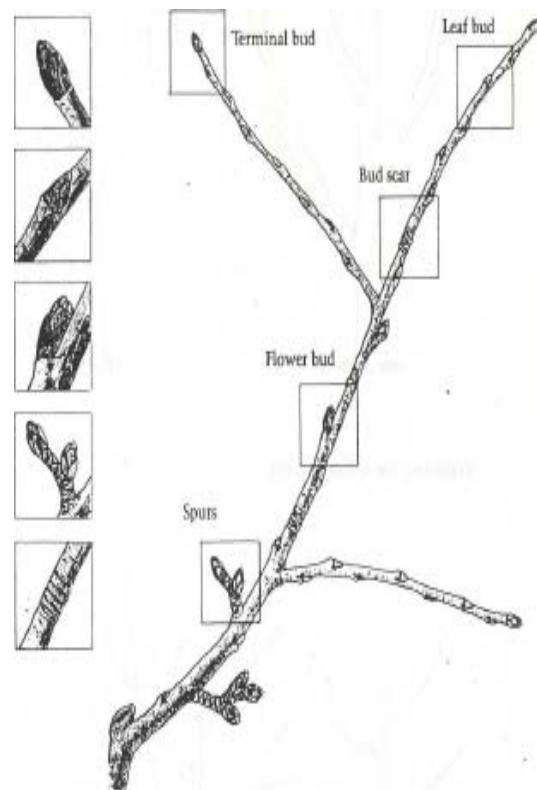
Terminal Bud: The fat bud at a branch tip will always grow first and fastest if you leave it. Cut it, and several buds will grow behind it.

Leaf Bud: Flattish triangle on the side of a branch. To make one grow, cut just above it. Choose buds pointing outward from the trunk so the growing branch will have space and light.

Flower Bud: Plump compared to leaf buds and first to swell in spring. On stone fruits they grow alone or beside leaf buds. On apples and pears they grow with a few leaves.

Spur: A short twig on apples, pears, plums, and apricots that grow on older branches, produce fat flower buds, then fruit. Don't remove them.

Bud scar: A ring on a branch that marks the point where the terminal bud began growing after the dormant season. The line marks the origin of this year's growth.



Types of Tree Forms

Central leader: one dominant trunk all the way to the top; strong, good light penetration; difficult to reach higher branches with large trees

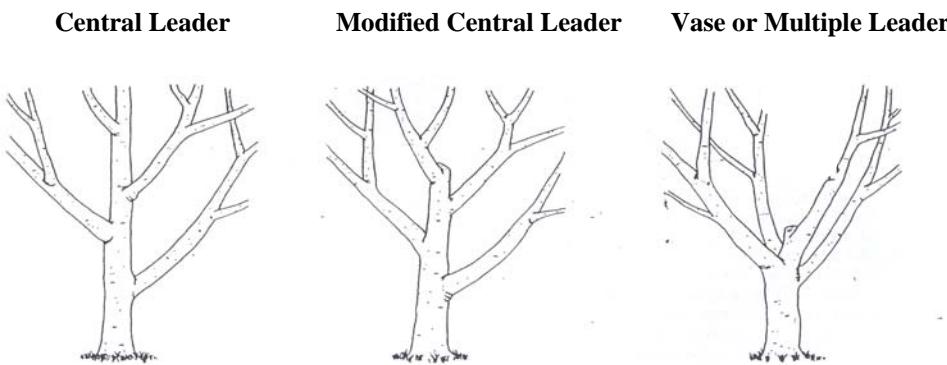
Modified central leader: central leader trunk to 6 to 10 feet, then multiple leader; combines strength of central trunk with sun-filled center of vase shape

Vase shape or multiple leader: vase shape with many branches; short trunk of about 3 feet with three or four main limbs, each of which has fully filled-out secondary branches, creating an open center allowing light to reach all branches

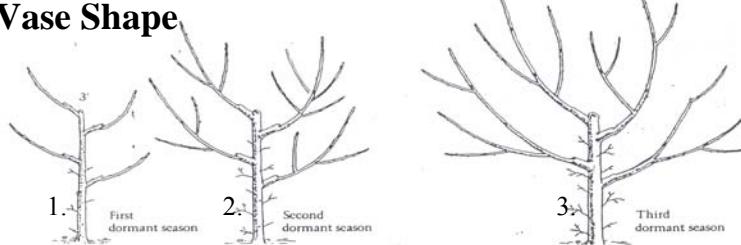
Others: include espalier and trellis

Three Methods of Training

reprinted from *All About Growing Fruits, Nuts, and Berries* (Ortho):



Training for a Vase Shape



1. First dormant season: After the tree has grown through the spring, summer, and fall and into its first winter dormancy, choose three or four branches with wide (45°) crotches, looking for branches that radiate evenly around the trunk. Try to have at least 6" vertical distance between branches, with the lowest branch about 15-18" above the ground. Cut off the vertical stem just above the top one. (If there are fewer than three good branches, head cut the vertical stem and choose the remaining scaffold branches during the next dormant season.)

2. Second dormant season: If necessary choose the remaining scaffold branches and cut off the vertical stem just above the highest selected scaffold branch. Remove the weakest side branches from the scaffold branches chosen last season, leaving the main stem and laterals on each branch.

3. Third dormant season: Now is the time to thin surplus shoots and branches. Select the strongest and best-placed terminal shoot near the tip of each scaffold branch, as well as 4-6 other side shoots on each scaffold (branch). Leave the short weak shoots that grow straight from the trunk, to shade it and help produce food for the tree.

Fruit Tree Pruning - Frequently Asked Questions

Should I remove my big old apple tree?

Keep it if it has sentimental value, produces good fruit, shades the house, houses a swing or tree house for the kids. Otherwise, remove it and replace it with several dwarf or semi-dwarf fruit trees. The ideal tree for the home orchard is 5-10 feet, because at that height, you are best able to prune, spray, thin and harvest.

(See also EC 1005, Pruning to Restore an Old Apple Tree, \$1.50.)

Is it okay to prune suckers and watersprouts? When and how do I do it?

Such overly vigorous growth can be controlled by early summer pruning, which discourages them from regrowing; cut them off at the base. Better yet, rub them off with your thumb in May/June. Watersprouts will emerge following an overzealous dormant season pruning job; sometimes it's best to leave one or two of these, particularly as a replacement for the leader if it was cut, to discourage regrowth of the others.

Do I need to paint the wounds with a sealing compound?

No, this is no longer recommended. The tree or plant is best protected by proper pruning technique and timing. Sealing compounds encourage wood rot.

How can I slow the growth of a tree?

It is always best to select the right tree for the site, rather than try to work against nature. However, these techniques will help to retard the growth of a tree:

1. Reduce dormant pruning; prune more in June/July. (Winter pruning invigorates a tree; summer pruning decreases vigor and size.)
2. Give no or less nitrogen. Give less water.
3. Hand pull the water suckers in May/June, when they are 2-4 inches long and flexible; this makes it less likely they will regrow. (Pruning suckers in the winter insures they will regrow in the spring.) Leave a sucker on top of the tree to dominate, called apical dominance.

Should I prune a fruit tree when I plant it?

In digging up a young tree from the nursery, some of the root system can be damaged; top pruning is usually required to prevent tree stress due to the lack of balance between the root system and the top. However, excessive pruning of young trees may delay blossoming and fruiting.

For a single whip, prune tree to waist height at planting. Branching will begin at this pruning cut.

Pruning of Berries: Raspberries, Bush Berries, Grapes

Summer-bearing red raspberries (from EC 1306): Summer-bearing red raspberries are biennial in habit, growing one year and producing fruit the next.

During the dormant season, from October through early March, remove all weak, broken, diseased, and insect-damaged canes. thin remaining primocanes (new cane growth) to 10-12 canes per hill or 4-5 per foot of hedgerow, and shorten the canes to 5 ½ feet (to encourage branching).

In spring/summer, remove all canes that grow between the hills or in the row aisles by pruning or cultivating. After you have harvested the last of the fruit, remove all old floricanes on which fruit was borne.

Fall-bearing raspberries (from EC 1306): You can grow these plants for both an early summer and a fall crop. Primocanes (new cane growth) bear fruit in the fall at the tips of the cane and produce a second crop the following spring from lateral branches.

During the dormant season: Remove the weak or damaged canes and the two-year (spent) floricanes that bore the summer fruit. Remove the portion (tips) of canes that fruited last fall. Thin canes as for summer-bearing raspberry.

You can grow fall-bearing raspberry for a fall crop only. For this method, cut all canes to ground level when plants are dormant. When the new primocanes emerge, maintain a row width of 12-15 inches by removing excess suckers by pruning or cultivation.

Black and purple raspberries (from EC 1306): Black raspberry plants have arched canes rather than the more upright canes of red raspberry. New canes are not produced from roots; they develop only from the base of old canes. Purple raspberries are hybrids of red and black raspberries.

Late spring/summer: Black and purple raspberries need to be cut back during the growing season to encourage branching. Remove the top 3-4 inches of primocanes (new shoots). Do this early in the season so that you are topping blackcaps to a height of 2 feet and purples to 2 ½ feet to encourage them to produce lateral branches. You usually have to go over the planting several times during the summer. After harvest remove all floricanes (2-year old canes which have born fruit).

During the dormant season, remove all damaged canes and those less than ½-inch in diameter. Most plants have at least five canes larger than ½ inch. However, if all canes are smaller than ½ inch, remove all but the two or three largest ones. Lateral branches also should be shortened during the dormant period. Shorten laterals to 1-1 ½ feet in length. Cut unbranched canes to 2 ½ to 3 feet.

Pruning of Berries: Raspberries, Bush berries, Grapes (continued)

Blueberries (from EC 1304):

At planting, prune all branches back by about 30-40 percent to encourage vigorous new growth. Young plants require little pruning for the first 2 to 3 years. Remove dead or dying parts of branches and less vigorous, spindly growth around the base of plants to encourage vigorous upright growth.

Another approach from Fall Creek Farm and Nursery bulletin:

It is important that blueberries get established before allowing them to bear fruit. Thereafter, they should be heavily pruned each year to avoid overfruiting which results in small fruit or poor growth.

Remove all blooms as they appear the first year. In years thereafter, follow these steps after the leaves have dropped:

1. Remove low growth around the base. If it doesn't grow up, it gets pruned out!
2. Remove the dead wood, and non-vigorous twiggy wood. Select for bright reddish colored wood with long (at least 3-inch) laterals. Remove blotchy-colored short growth.
3. If $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the wood has not been removed by the above steps, thin out the fruiting laterals and small branches until this balance has been obtained.

Currents and gooseberries:

These bear on one- and two-year-old wood. Four-year-old and older wood produces poor berries and should be removed. Clean up bushes by removing the oldest shoots in winter, thinning out the new growth, and cutting out dead wood. If berries are very small one year, thin the following winter.

Grapes:

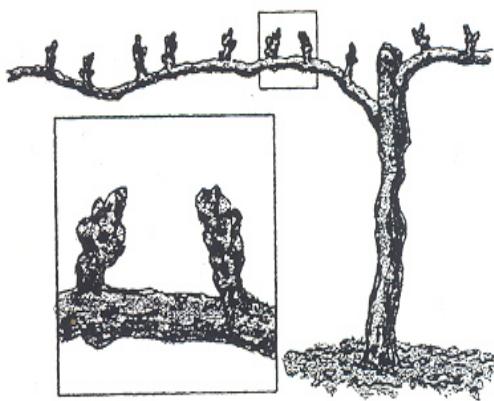
Grapes fruit on lateral shoots on year-old canes. All grapes require heavy pruning to produce fruit, but after the first three growing seasons, different types of grapes need different pruning. Wine grapes and muscadines usually need spur pruning, and American grapes, such as Concord and Thompson Seedless require cane pruning.

Dormant season:

Spur pruning, spurs are created by cutting all side branches on the lateral arms to two buds in late winter. Two new shoots grow on the spur you leave, and each produces a cluster of fruit.

Cane pruning involves pruning annually to remove all growth except two whole canes from the previous growing season and two other canes each cut back to a spur with two buds. The whole canes will produce fruiting shoots for next season and the spurs will form replacement canes for the following season. On a two-wire trellis, follow this procedure for both wires.

Summer pruning for spur and cane pruning: when fruit forms from the fruiting shoots, clip the shoot off beyond the next set of leaves past the last fruit.



Pruning of Berries: Raspberries, Bush Berries, Grapes (continued)

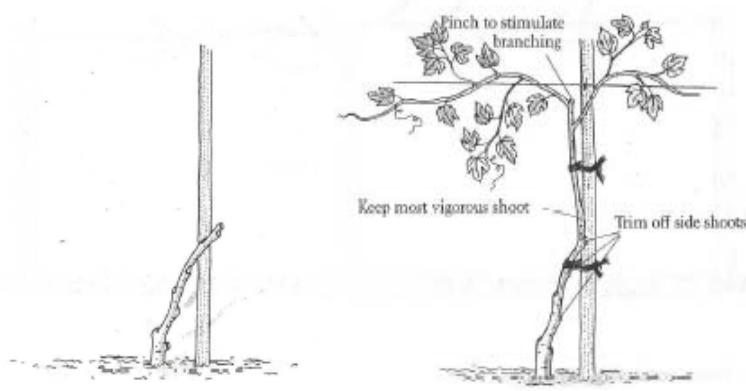
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Training Spur and Cane Grapes for the First Three Seasons

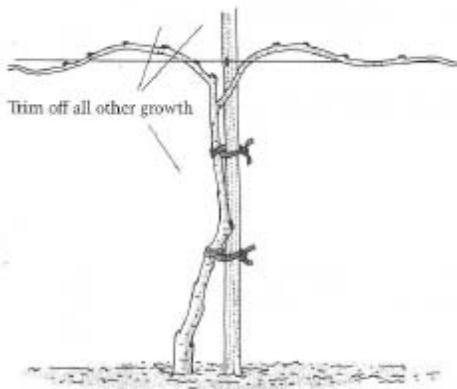
When you plant: Plant a rooted cutting with two or three buds above the soil, then bury the roots in light mulch.

First growing season: Leave the plant alone. It will grow a number of shoots.

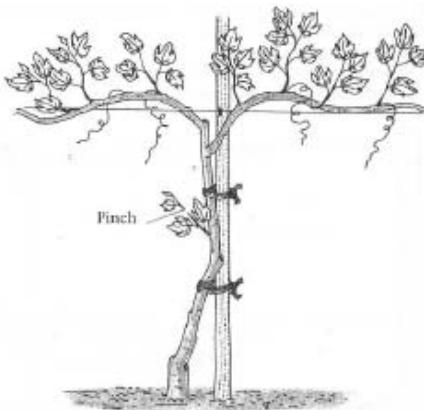
First dormant season: Choose the best Shoot and cut others to the base. Head remaining shoot to three or four strong buds.



Second growing season: When new shoots reach about 12" long, select the most vigorous and pinch off others at the trunk. Tie the remaining shoot to support (arbor post, Trellis post). When the shoot reaches branching point at arbor top or trellis wire, pinch it to force branching. Let two strong branches grow. Pinch any others at 8" to 10" long.



Second dormant season: Cut away side shoots, leaving only the trunk and two major branches. Tie these to the arbor top or the trellis wire.



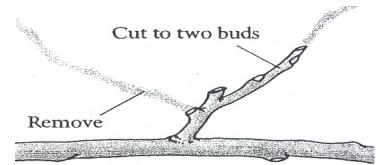
Third growing season: Let the vine grow. Pinch tips of sprouts on trunk. After this, spur and cane pruning differ.

Pruning of Berries: Raspberries, Bush Berries, Grapes (continued)

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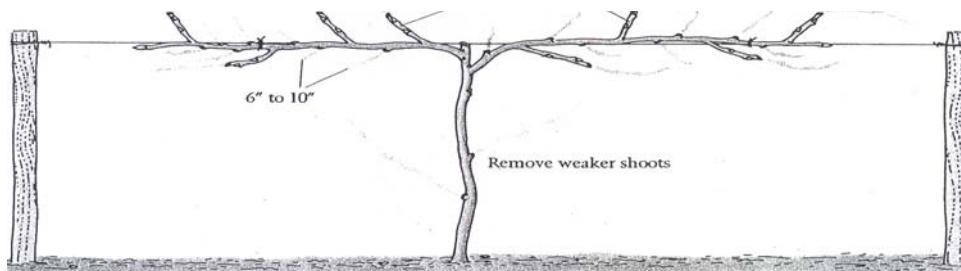
Spur Training of Grapes

Annually: Every dormant season, each spur will have two shoots that produced fruit during the summer. Cut off weak spurs. Cut the stronger spurs to two or three buds. These buds will produce fruit-bearing shoots in summer. Repeat each year. Always keep the trunk clear of growth.



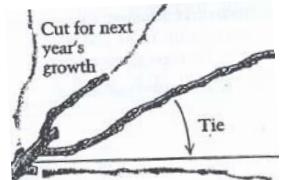
Third dormant season: Remove all shoots from the vertical trunk. Choose the strongest side shoots on horizontal branches and cut to two buds. Remove weak shoots at the base, spacing a spur, cut to two buds, every 6" to 10".

Cut stronger spurs
to two buds

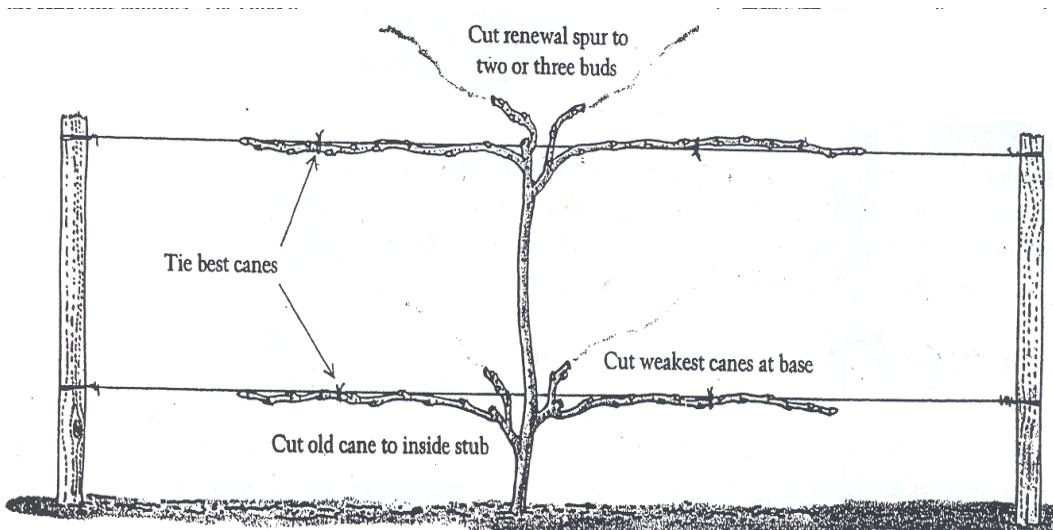


Cane Training of Grapes

Annually: When the outside cane has borne fruit, cut it back to the inside stub, now holding two or three new canes. Select the best and tie it to the trellis for fruit. Cut the next cane to two or three buds. Remove the weakest at the base. Repeat each year.



Third dormant season: Remove shoots from the trunk. Cut horizontal branches back so that two long shoots remain on each. On a 2-wire trellis, you can leave up to eight shoots per vine. Tie the shoot farthest from the trunk to the trellis. Cut the other to 2-3 buds. The tied shoot will fruit the following summer. The clipped shoot will produce growth to replace it the next winter, and fruit the year after.



Pruning Roses

Why Prune Roses?

Roses should be pruned to encourage new growth and a succession of flowers throughout the growing season. If pruned improperly, plants will be weak caned, with poor form and very little air circulation. Under pruning, year after year, is the most common cause of an unproductive rose. A rose, unpruned for several years, can be rejuvenated by pruning.

When to Prune

- **Winter pruning:** In the Willamette Valley prune **from mid-February to early March**, when the weather is conducive for the plants to start growing. Earlier pruning (before last hard frost or forecasted bad weather) may cause die-back necessitating re-pruning.
- **Bare root roses at planting:** To encourage the plant to concentrate on growth, prune the canes to 6 inches or less.
- **Fall pruning:** Take a several inches off Hybrid Tea, Floribunda, and Grandiflora to reduce wind damage.

Deadheading

Repeat blooming roses, including climbers, will bloom more profusely if faded blossoms are removed. Cut the stem back to an outward facing bud, cutting at a 45° angle to increase air circulation, encourage the plant to put nutrients and energy into the bud to produce more flowers.

Pruning Tools

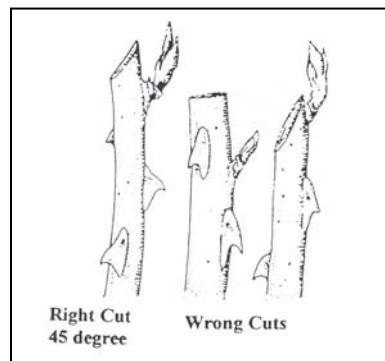
- Hand pruners (by-pass, not anvil type)
- Long-handled loppers, 18 inch (by-pass, not anvil type)
- Bottle of rubbing alcohol or 10:1 diluted bleach
- Whetstone or diamond plate (Unlike stones which can become rounded, decreasing their effectiveness, diamond plates remain flat. They do not require the use of a lubricant.)
- Oil

Purchase the best tools you can afford and be sure they feel comfortable and fit your hand.

How to Prune

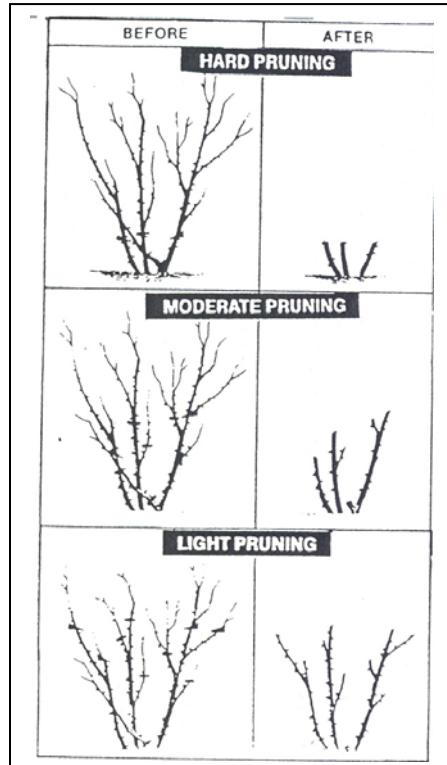
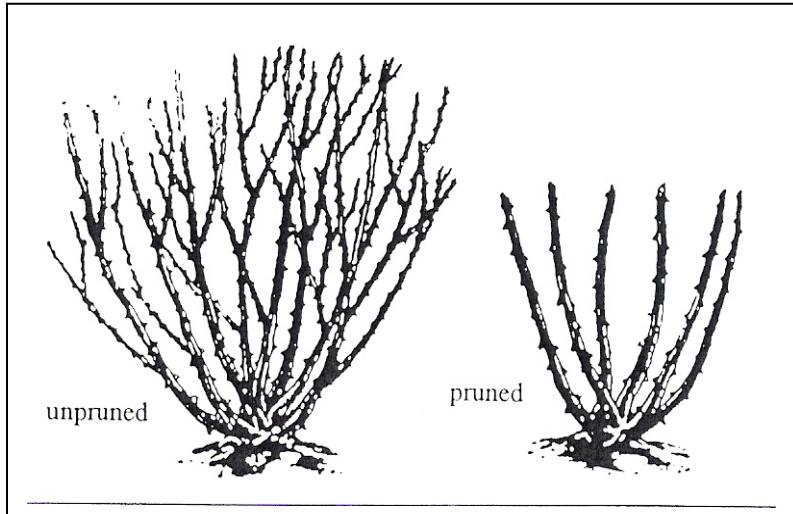
Pruning Cut

Make a clean 45 ° angle cut on a downward slant, away from the bud, about $\frac{1}{4}$ " above an outward facing bud eye. Cutting to an outside bud to increase air circulation. Strip the bush of foliage two weeks before pruning to cause new buds to swell. Cut rather than tear Hybrid Tea leaves to prevent damage to dormant buds.



Prune annually to encourage healthy plants. Start by removing **dead, dying or diseased** canes. Cut canes to white or pale green live pith. Brown coloration indicates a dead or dying cane and may require pruning to a bud eye lower to the crown to find live pith.

Create a vigorous rose by selecting from 3 to 6 strong basal shoots from previous year's growth to keep. Remove all other growth then prune back the selected canes.



Rose Varieties

Each rose needs to have the correct form for its variety and likes plenty of air circulation. Crossing canes tend to promote damage to the canes which encourage disease.

Hybrid Tea-Grandiflora: Natural plant shape is like a large vase. Deadhead during season to promote re-bloom. Moderately prune to 12-18 inches.

Floribunda: Generally a larger plant, than hybrid tea roses and have flowers in clusters. They are pruned not so severe. Remove interior lateral canes to promote air circulation. Moderately prune to 24-36 inches.

Climbers: Repeat bloomers should be pruned while dormant. Remove all twiggy, dead or nonproductive growth. Only laterals coming from main cane should be pruned. Leave 3-5 eyes on each lateral. Major canes are maintained horizontally to promote maximum bloom.

Miniature Roses: Prune to shape by cutting back to outward bud. May be sheared.

(Another Approach to Ornamentals)

Plant Amnesty's Guide to Pruning

Written and reprinted with permission by Cass Turnbull, Plant Amnesty 906 NW 87th, Seattle WA 98117
(206-783-9813) web site = www.plantamnesty.org

Northwest: Pacific Maritime List. Sunset-Western Climate. Zone 4-5

Don't: Ornamental trees should never, ever be topped. And shrubs should rarely be sheared (except real topiary and formal hedges). Stripping all of the side branches off of a mature pine or any other tree or shrub, is also a no-no. Stripping is not to be confused with selective thinning, which can also make shrubs and trees look open and Oriental.

Do: Prune to enhance a plant's natural beauty; to make it feel less oppressive, tidier, cleaner; to reduce size somewhat, depending on the type of plant. Selective pruning will reduce the bulk of the plant and taking off a few lower limbs of a tree is okay.

How: There are **two types of pruning cuts, thinning and heading.**

A **heading** cut is basically cutting off the tip or end of a branch, twig, or stem. Heading creates bushiness. The next spring growth is stimulated at the tips of cut branches. Shearing, topping and pinching hedges are heading cuts. Good for hedges and chrysanthemums. Not too good for most shrubs and trees. A **thinning** cut removes the branch back to another branch or twig, or to the ground. Most pruning consists of thinning cuts. It forces new growth in existing branches and spreads new growth more evenly throughout the plant. Thinning cuts will let light into the interior, allowing for green branches to cut to if you choose to reduce the size of your shrub. It stays "done" longer and looks natural.

Pruning by Habit

Prune to enhance the plant's natural shape or "habit". Plants have one of three basic habits.

1. **Cane Growers:** Plants that renew themselves by sending up new branches – called canes – from the base. Forsythias, roses, bamboo, kerria, weigela – very tough plants – you can hardly hurt them.

Stare (LOOK) at your shrub. Take out all **dead wood**. Always do this first. Take out some (1/3 to 1/8) of the biggest and oldest, as well as a few of the puniest canes, to the base. Do this every year to keep the size controlled. Pick out a few of the worst canes that **rub or cross** each other, that look sick or go the **wrong** way (that is, start at the outside, head back through the center and out the other side), and **ugly** branches (usually to straight). Generally prune to **open up the center**. **Tidy up** the top with thinning cuts. Cut back anything hanging on the ground and cut to a side branch or bud. Prune with vigor!
2. **Mounds:** The plants look like mounds and are medium-tough plants. Found in mass planting. They have small leaves and supple branches. You usually just want to tidy them up or reduce their size. People like to shear these --- don't you! Examples of mounds are abelias, escallonia, barberries and Mexican orange. These are easiest to make and keep small.

Locate the longest, most unruly branch. Grab the tip with your left hand. Follow the branch **down into the interior** of the plant with your right-hand pruners, and snip it off two inches to one foot below the general surface level (TOP) of your shrub. Cut to a side branch or bud, if possible. (Grab & Snip method) Do this all over your shrub until it looks miraculously tidy and shorter, but

natural. These shrubs often benefit from taking out some of the old canes at their base. This opens up and renews the shrub. Any dead wood or weeds should also be removed.

3. **Tree-Likes:** Best let to get big. Not to be pruned heavy-handedly. Good selective pruning can open them up and make them look less oppressive, can train branches around gutters and off of houses and can bring more beauty out of your plant. These shrubs are the hardest to do. Never remove more than 1/8 total leaf surface in one year. It stresses them or it can cause a watersprout-rebound effect-ick. Tree-likes have stiffish branches, generally. Examples of tree-likes include rhododendron, Andromeda (pieris), magnolia, deciduous Viburnum, camellia and witch hazel. Most tree-likes just need all the **dead wood** taken out.

If you still want to do more: Take out **suckers** (straight-up, skinny branches from the base and trunk of the shrub or tree). Take out any big **crossing, rubbing branches and double leaders** (two main top branches with a narrow branch-crotch angle) on trees. Take back or remove any branches **hanging on the ground**, if only up $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Take out the worst of the smaller crossing, rubbing branches --- choosing the healthiest and best placed branch to remain.

Prune to shorten or completely remove the worst **wrong-way branches** that start from the outside of the shrub, and go the wrong way back into the center and out the other side. Sometimes a side branch of the shrub, and go the wrong way back into the center and out the other side. Sometimes a side branch has a smaller branch that heads too far up into the next "layer", or goes to far down. You can cut some of these off to add more definition to your shrub's branches.

If you have two **parallel branches** rather close together, it may look better to remove one. If you, have three parallel branches you may want to remove the center one. This will make things look nicer. Before you finish, stand back and observe. If necessary, you may sparingly shorten some branches on tree like shrubs (not trees). Cut back to a side branch.

Hints and Tips

On many shrubs and trees, especially tree-likes, you want to fix things slowly over three to five years. Do some now, come back next year. "Wander, ponder; and prune," the old saying goes. Pruners always stare at their shrubs, trying to locate unwanted branches, imagining their shrubs without this or that branch, seeing how it will grow next year --- seeing what needs to be done. Much like a haircut, it's easy to take it off, hard to put back on. Know when to quit.

If a plant is really too big, you may want to move it, remove it go ahead, be ruthless!) or renovate it (not dealt with here). But try real selective pruning first!

Helpful Lists

Mounds (Grab & Snip) Spiraeas, Hollys, Escallonia, Japanese Holly, Box Honeysuckle

Cane Growers (Cut canes to the ground) Roses, Oregon Grape, Kerria, Weigela, Wild Oregon Grape, Nandina (Heavenly Bamboo), red-twigs Dogwood, Buddleia (Butterfly Bush), Hydrangea, Bamboo, Deutzia, Forsythia

Tree-Likes (Thin-out, many small cuts) Elderberry, Manzanita, Kalmia, Deciduous Azaleas, Pieris (Andromeda), Rhododendrons, Enkianthus, Huckleberries, Lilac, Viburnums (Leatherleaf, Double-File, Highbush Cranberry, Winter, Snowball) Spindletrees

Water sprouts easily, therefore thin lightly: Cotoneaster, Hamamelis, Cherry, Crabapple, Filbert (Hazelnut), Fig, Parrotia, Magnolia, Plum, Dogwood

Takes heavy thinning or arborizing: Camellia, Laurel, Strawberry Tree, Mature Rhododendron, Photinia

Tough Tree-Likes (Can be headed into hedges or let go natural) Photinia, Phyracantha, Yew, Privet, Laurel

