

PRUNING SHRUBS

The first rule of pruning *flowering* shrubs is: "Prune directly after bloom". Pruning non-flowering shrubs is ideally done when they are dormant or not in active growth. Some shrubs don't lose their leaves during dormancy. When deciduous shrubs have lost all their leaves is a good indication that evergreen shrubs are not in active growth and can be pruned. Another rule is never to use hedging shears to control size or shape (with the possible exception of Boxwood).

Even shrubs which have been allowed to keep their natural shape often need some "**selective pruning**". This means removing all branches which rub against another, clipping away twigs and dead, damaged or diseased wood, removing waterspouts, and selectively pruning for size and shape. When reducing the size of a branch, clip as far back into the interior as practical, to hide the cut. Make sure there is some growth or leaf nodes just behind the cut or you will be left with a bare stub. Take your time and step back and assess what you have done and what still remains to be done. This can be done at any time.

Some shrubbery requires "**renewal pruning**". This would apply to shrubs which have become leggy with little lower foliage or have a barren interior. Renewal Pruning means cutting down the entire growth to 12 to 18 inches from the ground. This type of pruning requires courage and a stout heart. It's not easy to reduce a 7 or 8 foot shrub to a foot or two! However, it will give you new, healthy shrubs in just a year or two. Winter or very early spring is the recommended time to do this.

The third method of pruning is for shrubs which have severely outgrown their space, but for reasons of privacy or esthetics, renewal pruning is not an option. This is the '**three year method**'. An alternative to the drastic removal of most of the top-growth on multiple stem shrubs is to cut back all stems at ground level over a period of three years. At the first pruning, remove one-third of the old, mature stems. The following year, take out one-half of the remaining old stems and head back long shoots growing from the previous pruning cuts. At the third pruning in yet another year, remove the remaining old wood and head back the long new shoots.