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## PRUNING WOODY ORNAMENTALS

Woody plants make some new growth each spring, or shortly die out for lack of vigor. Good growth requires regulating, by pruning at times, for best development. Pruning may well be the most important care given to trees and shrubs each year. The following are reasons for pruning:

1. Removal of dead wood and broken branches.
2. Removal or reduction of diseased and insect infested branches.
3. Removal of some growth to promote sturdier structure, better distribution of branches for long range development (trees and evergreens) and for more vigorous flowering shrubs.

### **Trees:**

Try to keep one strong leader (top shoot) growing well; if it forks, remove the lesser to avoid weak crotch formation. For shade trees, remove lower branches as upper ones grow, so that when trees mature, one can walk safely underneath it. Dense branching can be thinned to allow more sunlight for better lawns.

Watch carefully to remove branches which grow to rest against one another causing branches to chafe or chatter, or those which may make the tree become lopsided. Tree pruning can be done anytime from mid-summer to April 1; avoid Maples from January to May as unsightly bleeding occurs by late winter.

### **Shrubs:**

Most shrubs renew from the ground by sending up a few new shoots each spring. As a rule, the older stems of several years become darker in color, less vigorous and flower poorly. These should be cut back to the ground line by April 1. If old shrubs become unwieldy, cut all to the ground and fertilize the soil for new growth (recovery in two years is possible for many shrubs. Some will not tolerate this pruning practice, such as burning bush.)

For thinning spring flowering shrubs (Forsythias, Spirea, Honeysuckle, Weigela and Mockorange), wait until petals fall, then do pruning immediately, before new growth begins.

### **Evergreens:**

These are pruned only to head back leading side branches to make the bushes more compact. Early July is the best time as new growth buds will yet develop. Never cut main central leaders in tree types, except when a double forms.

### **Vines:**

Hardy vines are treated as early flowering shrubs. Exceptions are those with heavy trunk-like stems, as in Trumpetvine; here only the branches are cut back to 4-5 buds, mainly to induce better flowering. Hybrid Clematis usually comes up from the ground each spring. You usually won't hurt anything if you prune hard in spring. See Clematis Pruning from more details.

### **Pruning vs. Shearing:**

Shrubs in mixed borders and foundation plantings should never be sheared over to form artificial shapes; this is the mark of the amateur, and ruins both flowering and character.

Formal, box-shaped hedges are for working off the shearing urge; for any great lengths, use an electric shear. Always shear often so that only 3-4" of new growth is removed at any one time; Privet may require four shearings a season.