

# PRUNING ESSENTIALS FOR YOUR GARDEN

Pruning is an essential landscape management duty that is often neglected. There are two types of people in this world: those who prune and those who don't. If you are one of those gardeners in the latter category here are three reasons why pruning is necessary.

- Improves the health and beauty of the plant
- Maintains its growth habit
- Ensures prolific flowering and fruiting for years to come

A general rule of thumb is to prune summer flowering shrubs in the early spring and to prune spring flowering plants immediately after blossoming. Of course, there are exceptions to every rule--so if you are not sure consult with your local nursery. The Toronto Botanical Garden (formerly the Civic Garden Centre) has a wonderful horticultural library in the North York area and is a great resource for your pruning questions.

Sterilize your tools with alcohol or bleach before you begin. You do not want to spread disease(s) from one plant to another. Prune with a purpose in mind--not because you want to experiment with your new pair of garden clippers. Here are some guidelines for pruning a mature shrub.

1. Prune away dead branches or twigs and remove diseased foliage
2. Remove living branches that cross over and rub other healthy sections of wood
3. Prune for easy access along pedestrian pathways. If the shrub is running interference with your entry into the garden, for example you may want to reconsider where the shrub is located.

4. If the interior of the shrub is crowded and dense, you may need to thin out the branches that are growing from the base of the shrub.
5. Prune for aesthetics. Look at the overall form and growth habit of the shrub. The goal is to establish a balanced and natural form. Take a few steps back and view your work after a minute or so of cutting. You don't want to cut too much.

Remember to wear eye protection and a long sleeved shirt when you are pruning even the smallest shrub. Safety in the garden is worth the effort.

Pruning is a fine art: the art of landscape management. The goal is to keep your existing ten year old garden looking as good as the first five years. An overgrown garden is not as ideal as a mature, well maintained garden.

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