

# SHRUB PRUNING GUIDE

Max out the flower potential of your shrubs with these simple pruning techniques.

## WEB EXTRA

Sharp tools make better cuts. Learn how to sharpen your pruners here.

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It might seem a bit scary to get out a pair of pruners and start cutting on a shrub you've spent time growing into a beautiful hedge, specimen or border companion. But regular pruning keeps shrubs healthier, at a manageable size and, best of all, it can help them flower more. The trick is knowing when and where to cut to get the most floriferous results. I'll go over some

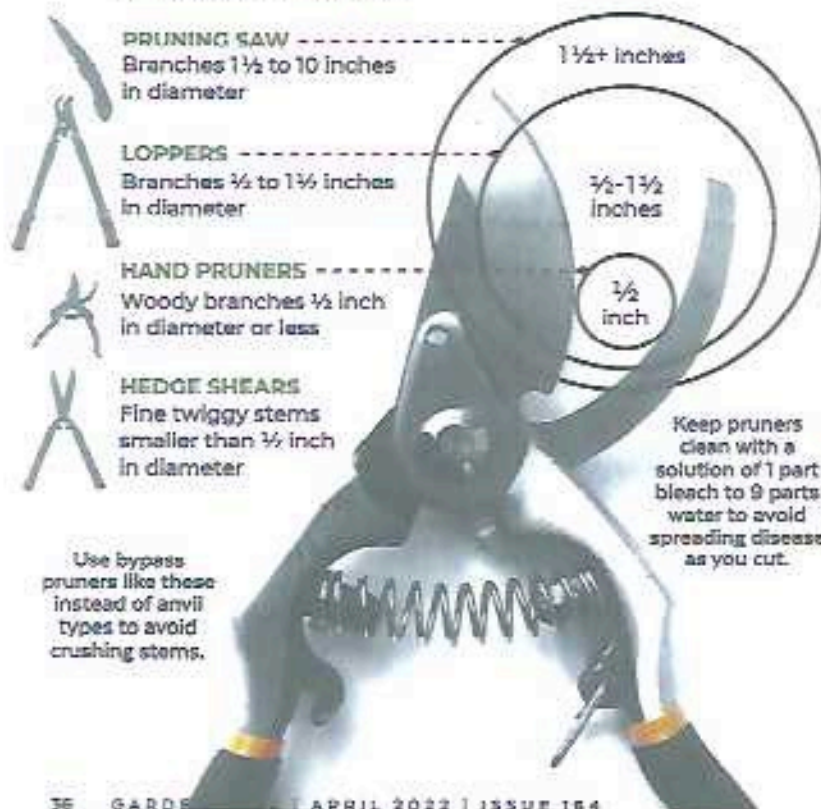
of the basics here then show you more specific tips for 15 popular shrubs on the following pages. If you make a few mistakes along the way, don't worry; Shrubs are pretty forgiving. Here's how to grow your pruning skills and get more flowers from those beautiful shrubs in the border. ■

— Sherri Ribbey

Sherri prunes the double lilac next to her front porch every year to keep lots of those fragrant blooms coming each spring.

## Choose the Right Tool

Matching the tool to the size branch that you need to prune will make the job a lot easier — and safer! The right tool makes a cleaner cut that doesn't crack the branch or tear bark and it's easier on your hands, too.



## WHEN TO PRUNE

**1** Prune dead, diseased or damaged branches and deadhead anytime.

**2** When pruning to head back, thin or rejuvenate, the best time depends on the type of shrub: Prune summer-flowering shrubs in late winter or early spring. This is because they generally bloom on "new wood," buds that form and set blooms in the same year. Prune them as soon as they come out of dormancy, before they start setting buds.

Prune spring-flowering shrubs soon after they bloom. They bloom on "old wood," buds that formed the previous summer. Prune them before these buds form to avoid missing out on flowers.

**3** Don't prune to head back, thin or rejuvenate in late summer or early fall because it triggers new growth that could be damaged in winter.

## 4 PRUNING TECHNIQUES

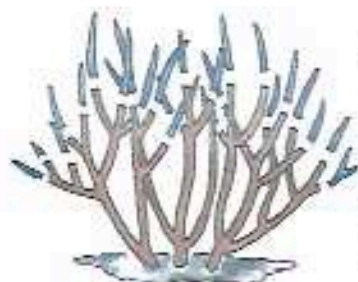
Pruning does a lot to keep shrubs looking great. Here are four techniques and how they'll help your shrubs bloom better, have healthier foliage and less disease.



### Deadhead

**WHY DO IT?** Get rid of spent blooms as needed, tidy up the plant, encourage rebloom and prevent unwanted reseeding.

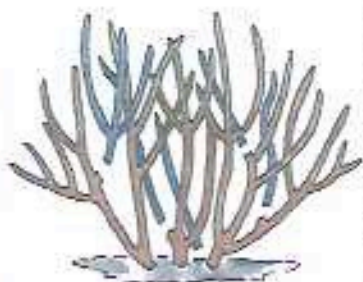
**HOW TO DO IT** Pinch or snip off spent blooms with your fingers or hand pruners.



### Head Back

**WHY DO IT?** To control size but still maintain a natural shape.

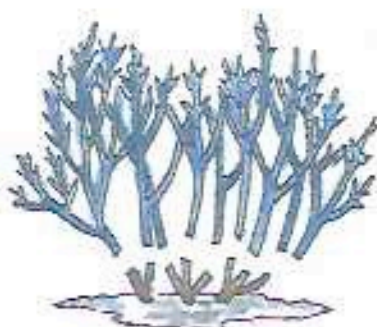
**HOW TO DO IT** Snip stem tips off at different lengths all over the shrub with hand pruners. Some shrubs may need this annually.



### Thin

**WHY DO IT?** To encourage thicker foliage growth and more flowers without reducing the height.

**HOW TO DO IT** You'll need loppers or a pruning saw to remove a few of the oldest stems at the base and take out a few branches from the center of the shrub. This will increase light in the center of the plant and allow air to circulate, which prevents disease. Some shrubs never need thinning, but some fast-growing species may benefit from it annually.



### Rejuvenate

**WHY DO IT?** To bring new life to an overgrown shrub. This will encourage fresh new stems to form from the base of the plant.

**HOW TO DO IT** There are a couple of techniques you can use on older shrubs. You might choose to do it in stages or tackle a drastic rejuvenation all at once. Either way you'll need loppers or a pruning saw.

**Rejuvenate in Stages** Remove a third of the largest woody stems every year until you've cleared them all out. Doing it gradually preserves some flowers each year on shrubs that bloom on old wood. It's a good choice for slow-growing shrubs and those that have a large, woody base.

**Drastic Rejuvenation** Cut all the stems back to within a few inches of the ground as the illustration above shows. Fast-growing shrubs that bloom on new wood, such as spirea or deutzia, will completely recover the same year. Slower-growing plants that bloom on old wood, such as common lilac, may take a few years to reach the size you're hoping for.

### Botanical Names

Common lilac  
*Syringa vulgaris*  
Deutzia  
*Deutzia gracilis*  
Spiraea  
*Spiraea japonica*

## MAKE THE RIGHT CUT

If you're standing there, pruners in hand, wondering exactly where and how to cut the stems on the shrub in front of you, use this guide.



**THE BEST CUT**  
A 45 degree angle, 1/4 inch above a leaf bud.



**AVOID LEAVING LONG STUBS OR STEEP ANGLES** These cuts heal slowly and create an opening for vascular pathogens that cause disease. And a steep angle can weaken the bud.



**DON'T CUT TOO CLOSE TO THE BUD** This weakens the bud's attachment to the stem.



**WHEN LEAF BUDS ARE OPPOSITE, a flat cut 1/4 inch above the buds is OK.**