

Pruning Techniques & Tips



Why Prune?

Pruning is necessary for thinning, rejuvenating, promoting growth, blooming and controlling plant size. Use a good pair of sharp, pruners to ensure clean cuts.

Deadheading

Deadheading is cutting the stem of the plant off below a dead or spent bloom. This may promote re-blooming. This technique applies to many perennials, roses, annuals, and summer blooming shrubs. On some plants, it looks best to prune the stem off at the next lower set of leaves or foliage grouping. This prevents bare wood stubs. Do not dormant prune early spring blooming shrubs such as lilacs, quince, forsythia, some viburnum, and early blooming spirea. These shrubs bloom on old wood. If pruning is necessary to keep the size contained, prune immediately after their blooming period.

Pinching & Heading Back

This technique induces branching and compact growth. It also works on houseplants. Several plants can be pinched including petunias, eliminating a plant's leggy appearance. Simply go to an area on the stem close to some foliage and cut it off. On evergreen trees and shrubs, this pinching technique is done on the candles of the plant. Simply cut off the candle at the length desired to reduce size or growth. You can cut the entire length of the candle off or just portions, preventing that candle from sending out any growth. The branch will send out new growth further down on the stem or branch resulting in a denser and more compact plant. Avoid cutting back to older bare wood on evergreens. They may not needle back out due to lack of buds.

Thinning

This technique selectively removes entire branches or stems of the plant. It promotes growth from the ground up rather than top growth. It creates a more open and natural look. Thinning also helps light filter through plants. This helps maintain lower foliage that may be lost due to lack of light.

Layering

Layering is the practice of pruning stems or branches at varying height levels. It prevents dense ends and prohibits top growth. This practice is best for shrubs such as sand-cherry, burning bush, and viburnum when foliage close to the ground is desired.

Shearing

Shearing trains shrubs and trees to a specific shape or to create formal hedges. Shearing is usually done with hedge shears or power trimmers. Some shrubs recover better from shearing. Boxwood and privet are two good examples.

Rejuvenation

This is a radical or drastic cutting, often completely down to ground level or just above the ground. Most spirea, caryopteris, butterfly bush, and perennials are done this way. New growth is generated from the root system, often resulting in a denser and compact habit. Late winter or early spring is the best time for this drastic pruning.



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