



# PRUNING BASICS

## WHAT'S YOUR GOAL?



Start by taking note of the type of plant being pruned and ask yourself what the goal or desired effect is:

- Limit size
- Direct growth
- Promote plant health
- Alter or rejuvenate
- Achieve artificial form
- Prevent/repair damage
- Maintain safety
- Remove unwanted growth
- Highlight attractive feature
- Push flower/fruit production

## PRUNING BUDGET



Most plants have a “pruning budget” and can only afford to lose 25–30% of their growth at one time.

It is important to continuously “balance your budget” by evaluating how much of the plant has been removed—stand back, assess the process often, and snap before/after photos.

## TERMS & TECHNIQUES



**Terminal & Lateral Buds:** The terminal bud grows at the tip of a shoot, making that shoot longer over time. Lateral buds grow along the sides of the shoot where leaves attach, producing sideways growth and creating density. Until the shoot grows long enough, lateral buds stay dormant under the influence of hormones sent out by the terminal bud.

**Lateral Pruning (Heading Back):** Removing the terminal bud on a branch or stem to stimulate growth of lateral buds below the cut, resulting in clusters of shoots; helps change direction of branch growth. Pinching refers to removing shoots with shears or forefinger and thumb on soft, new growth.

- Flat cut stimulates two new shoots to grow below the cut.
- Diagonal cut produces one shoot from high end of the cut.

**Shearing:** Cutting all branches to one desired length, creating an even surface, as in a hedge.

**Thinning:** Cutting a limb or branch back to where it begins (trunk) or to its junction with another branch; encourages growth on remaining parts of the plant and aids in circulation. When a plant sends up stems directly from the ground (suckers), the cut should occur at ground level.

**Dead, Damaged, Diseased & Dysfunctional Growth (4 Ds):** Scrape bark for signs of life. Remove dead/diseased parts immediately. Sterilize tools with disinfectant between each cut to prevent spreading of disease. Identify suckers and water sprouts as dysfunctional growth; learn how to manage. Deadwood removal does not count against “pruning budget.”

## BASIC TOOLS



**Hand pruners (bypass/anvil):** For cuts ¾ to 1-inch diameter. Many pros use Felco brand for its high quality, replaceable parts, and specialty styles (left-hand, small hands).

**Loppers (bypass/anvil):** Large hand pruners with long handles; for branches up to 2 or 3 inches diameter. Long handles reach higher into trees or deeper into dense shrubs.

**Pruning Saw (folding):** Powerful tool for cutting thicker, harder wood. Slightly bowed with sharp teeth on both sides; quickly cuts while moving both forward and backward.

## PRUNING CALENDAR



### January to March

- Young or weak trees and shrubs
- Summer blooming shrubs (roses)
- Damaged branches from winter
- Blueberries at least 3 years old

### March to mid-April

- Non-blooming broadleaf evergreens
- Evergreen/deciduous hedge plants
- Trim winter dormant grasses
- Check for new buds on hardy fuchsia—prune back to green shoots when they appear

### April to May

- Shear back broad-leafed/needled evergreens
- After bloom, prune spring-flowering trees and shrubs (e.g. azaleas, camellias, daphne, forsythia, lilac, rhodias, cherries, plums, deciduous magnolias, crabapples)

### June to August

- Shear back broad-leafed/needled evergreens
- Trim overgrown or neglected deciduous trees and shrubs
- Remove suckers, water sprouts, and spent blooms on flowering plants (wait until hydrangeas are done blooming)
- Late-summer pruning of Japanese maples can help shape/train, but may be easier if done in late winter while leafless
- Avoid pruning Japanese maples in early spring (sap)

### September to mid-December

- Winter prep for safety and branches vulnerable to damage

### Late December to mid-February (over 20°F)

- Perennials/shrubs that die back over winter
- Fruit trees in dormancy and blueberries
- Deciduous non-blooming trees
- Many summer-blooming clematis