

Proper Hedge, Tree, and Shrub Pruning

Maintaining a pristine and attractive landscape requires dedication, hard work *and* pruning. And, when the landscape includes a regimen of trees, shrubs and hedges, you can rest assured that your landscape diet includes pruning. Pruning helps direct growth and allows light and air to the plant while removing excess weight of damaged and diseased branches.

Depending on the plant, the best time to prune will vary. For example, trim early-spring and flowering shrubs immediately after they bloom. For summer-flowering plants, clip them in winter or early spring and non-flowering plants can be trimmed right after the new growth is completely formed. The following are some tips to assist you with each type of pruning.

Hedges

1. Pruning 101 – Start with clean (including disinfected) and sharp tools. You can lay a tarp down to make cleanup easier.
2. Use a hedge trimmer with an extended reach and pivoting cutting to simplify tall hedges and shrub which will help you get to those hard-to-reach areas. Hand pruners are best for smaller branches.
3. Some people prefer to remove the thickest branches first, while others go for the suckers (the branches that grow at the base of the trunk). Either approach works.
4. Remove growth by cutting back the branch right above new growth and, also, at the base of the plant. Do NOT use electric trimmer for this!

Trees

1. At planting, remove only diseased, dead, or broken branches. Begin training a plant during the dormant season following planting.
2. Prune to shape young trees, making certain not to cut back the leader. Remove crossing branches and any branches growing back towards the center of the tree.
3. With large trees, make a shallow cut underneath the branch, about 4 to 5 inches from the trunk.
4. Cut the branch about 2 to 3 inches from the first cut. This will cause the weight of the unsupported branch to fall and the initial cut will prevent the bark from peeling along the side.
5. You can now make the final cut and remove the rest of the stub. Be careful to cut this **just outside** of the branch collar where the branch and trunk are joined together.

Shrubs

1. Start by removing dead limbs at the base and try to avoid making the top wider than the base. Your goal is to get sunlight to reach the entire plant.
2. Make certain not to cut more than 1/3 of your shrubs each year. As you create holes in your shrubs, new growth will fill in and make the plant fuller and stronger.
3. Cutting straight lines can be a challenge, so use your house, stakes and strings and even siding as a guide. Consider using string if you want perfection.

4. Take your time and run a hedge trimmer along the top and sides. Make certain to let the blade do the work while keep the base wider than the top.
5. Always, always, always step back every once in a while and check your work!

With any planting and maintenance of hedges, shrubs and trees, you will more than likely have some of the following issues to deal with:

- Forked trunk
- Clustered branches
- Suckering
- Stubs
- Tree Wounds

Work diligently to stay on top of these issues and you will have tremendous success and receive kudos galore for your efforts.