



The Art of Pruning: Timing and Techniques

Pruning is one of the best things you can do for your shrubs. Regular pruning maintains the shrub size and prevents breakage during the winter months by managing the structure. It even creates more flowers as the shrub redirects its energy into flower production rather than overgrowth.

The chart that follows provides our timing recommendations for pruning some of the most popular shrubs in our area. The “Flower buds” column notes whether the buds form on new or old growth, and the “Comments” column includes some of our gardener’s tips to successfully prune your shrub of choice.

For reference, here are the pruning techniques we recommend:

- **Heading:** Trimming long, unbranched stems by cutting above a healthy bud. This encourages lower branches to develop.
- **Rejuvenation:** Cutting back all of the stems to within an inch of the ground during dormancy. Come spring, the plants will produce new shoots from the base.
- **Thinning:** Removing selected shoots, or the main stem, to open up the middle of the plant to more sunlight. This maintains the natural form, keeps the interior branches healthy, and encourages new growth.
- **Shearing:** Trimming the plant around the outside to restore structure in the landscape setting.

If you are not sure what types of plants are in your yard and whether or not they need pruning, bring a sample into our plant clinic, or take a photo and email it to us at service@mgcmail.com. We are happy to identify your plants for you.

Pruning Chart

Plant Name	Best time	Flower buds	Pruning method	Comments
Abelia <i>Abelia x grandiflora</i>	February - March	New growth	Thinning, Shearing	Shape as needed in growing season. Rejuvenate old plants.
Andromeda, Japanese <i>Pieris japonica</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune after flowering.
Aucuba <i>Aucuba japonica</i>	March - April	New growth	Heading, Shearing	Slowly rejuvenate old, leggy plants.
Azalea <i>Rhododendron spp.</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning	Prune after flowering. Rejuvenate overgrown plants.
Barberry <i>Berberis spp.</i>	March - May	New growth	Shearing	Shape as needed in growing season.
Bayberry, Northern <i>M. pensylvanica</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune to maintain natural shape.
Beautyberry <i>Callicarpa spp.</i>	January - February	New growth	Thinning, Heading	Rejuvenate old, leggy plants.

Plant Name	Best time	Flower buds	Pruning method	Comments
Boxwood <i>Buxus spp.</i>	February - March	N/A	Thinning, Heading	Annual thinning improves health and density. Can occasionally shear vigorous varieties.
Burning Bush <i>Euonymus alatus</i>	January - March	New growth	Thinning, Shearing	Shape as needed in growing season.
Butterfly bush <i>Buddleia spp.</i>	March - April	New growth	Rejuvenation, Thinning	Rejuvenate each spring. Deadhead spent flowers for rebloom.
Camellia <i>Camellia japonica</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Slow to recover from heavy pruning.
Camellia <i>Camellia sasanqua</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Slow to recover from heavy pruning.
Chastetree <i>Vitex agnus-castus</i>	February - March	New growth	Thinning, Heading	Rejuvenate old, leggy plants.
Cherry Laurel <i>Prunus laurocerasus</i>	May - June	Old growth	Heading, Shearing	Prune just after flowering. Shape as needed in growing season.
Cotoneaster <i>Cotoneaster spp.</i>	February - March	Old and new growth	Thinning	Remove dead branches and trim irregular growth. Shearing diminishes natural form.
Crape Myrtle <i>Lagerstroemia hybrids</i>	March - April	New growth	Thinning, Heading	Shearing diminishes natural form.
Daphne, Winter <i>Daphne odora</i>	April - May	Old growth	Heading	Little to no pruning necessary.
Deutzia <i>Deutzia spp.</i>	May - June	Old growth	Shearing, Heading	Prune after flowering.
Dogwood, Red-twig <i>Cornus alba</i>	March	Old growth	Rejuvenation, Thinning	Rejuvenate to encourage bright, colorful stems.
Firethorn <i>Pyracantha coccinea</i>	February - March	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Flowers and berries form on previous year's 'spurs'. Retain as many spurs as possible for berry production.
Forsythia <i>Forsythia hybrid</i>	April - May	Old growth	Thinning, Rejuvenation	Remove old canes annually to keep dense and full.
Fothergilla, Dwarf <i>Fothergilla gardenii</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune after flowering.
Heavenly Bamboo <i>N. domestica</i>	March - April	New growth	Thinning, Heading	Thin a few older branches on tall varieties to prevent leggy growth.
Holly <i>Ilex spp.</i>	February - March	Old growth	Shearing, Heading	Rejuvenate overgrown plants.
Hydrangea, smooth <i>H. arborescens</i>	January - March	New growth	Heading, Rejuvenation	Prune annually to keep dense.
Hydrangea, Big Leaf <i>H. macrophylla</i>	March	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Remove dead branches and tips. Deadhead repeat blooming varieties.

Plant Name	Best time	Flower buds	Pruning method	Comments
Hydrangea, Panicle <i>H. paniculata</i>	January - March	New growth	Thinning, Heading	Can rejuvenate overgrown plants.
Hydrangea, Oakleaf <i>H. quercifolia</i>	June - July	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune after flowering.
Jasmine, Winter <i>Jasminum nudiflorum</i>	March - April	Old growth	Thinning, Shearing	Prune after flowering.
Juniper Juniperus spp.	February - April	N/A	Shearing, Heading	Prune green tips only. Junipers will not regrow from woody stems.
Kerria <i>Kerria japonica</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Thin old, leggy stems after flowering.
Lilac, Common <i>Syringa vulgaris</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune after flowering.
Lilac, Dwarf Korean <i>Syringa meyeri</i>	June - July	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune after flowering.
Loropetalum <i>Loropetalum hybrid</i>	February - March	Old and new growth	Thinning, Rejuvenation	Prune in late winter, shape as needed in growing season.
Mahonia <i>Mahonia spp.</i>	March - April	Old growth	Thinning, Rejuvenation	Remove old, leggy stems in early spring.
Mockorange <i>Philadelphus hybrid</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune old, leggy stems after flowering.
Mountain Laurel <i>Kalmia latifolia</i>	June - July	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune after flowering. Rejuvenate old, leggy plants.
Ninebark <i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune after flowering. Thin branches and head back outer growth $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$.
Photinia, Red tip <i>Photinia x frasier</i>	February - March, Summer	Old growth	Thinning, Shearing	Thin branches in February - March. Shear tips in early summer to maintain red tips.
Privet <i>Ligustrum spp.</i>	February - March	New growth	Shearing, Heading, Rejuvenation	Trim as needed through growing season.
Pussywillow <i>Salix caprea</i>	April - May	Old growth	Thinning, Rejuvenation	Prune after flowering.
Quince, Flowering <i>Chaenomeles spp.</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Rejuvenation	Prune after flowering.
Rose, shrub <i>Rosa hybrid</i>	February - March	New growth	Rejuvenation, Thinning	Preserve main canes. Prune lateral branches to promote flowering. Does not apply to climbing rose.
Rose-of-Sharon <i>Hibiscus syriacus</i>	January - March	New growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune vigorous branches as needed in the growing season.
Smoke tree <i>Cotinus coggygria</i>	January - March	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Rejuvenate leggy plants.

Plant Name	Best time	Flower buds	Pruning method	Comments
Spirea, Bumald <i>Spirea x Bumalda</i>	May - June	Old and new growth	Thinning, Shearing	Deadhead for rebloom.
Spirea, Vanhoutte <i>Spirea x vanhouttei</i>	May - June	Old growth	Shearing, Rejuvenation	Prune after flowering.
Spirea, Japanese <i>Spirea japonica</i>	January - February	Old and new growth	Shearing, Rejuvenation	Shape as needed through the growing season.
Sweetshrub <i>Calycanthus floridus</i>	June - July	Old and new growth	Thinning, Rejuvenation	Thin 'suckers' after flowering.
Viburnum <i>Viburnum spp.</i>	May - June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune after flowering.
Virginia sweetspire <i>Itea virginica</i>	June - July	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Prune after flowering.
Weigela <i>Weigela florida</i>	May and June	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Remove old, leggy stems and shape as needed. Prune after flowering.
Winterberry <i>Ilex verticillata</i>	February - March	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Heavy pruning will diminish berry production. Thin out leggy branches.
Witchhazel <i>Hamamelis spp.</i>	March	Old growth	Thinning, Heading	Remove 'suckers' in January. Thin branches after flowering.