

A Brief Guide to Shrub Pruning

Why Prune and Train Shrubs

Initially pruning is carried out to ensure that plants are as healthy and vigorous as possible, free from structural weakness and at the least risk of being infected by disease.

A good start is always to remove anything dead, diseased or damaged first and then to follow the pruning guidelines. With variegated plants any growths that have reverted to green should also be removed to stop the plant becoming totally green.

Pruning can also increase ornamental features like flowers, foliage coloured stems and to create shapes as in topiary and to manage the size of a plant or adapt it to a specific situation e.g. shrubs trained on walls.

Deciduous Shrubs

General Rule – Prune after flowering. Winter, Spring and Early Summer shrubs flower on growth made the previous year.

Exception – Late summer flowering shrubs like Buddleja davidii flower on growth made in the current year and are pruned in late winter/early spring.

Deciduous shrubs to prune after flowering, if pruning is necessary.

For all to encourage more profuse flowering and fruiting remove older less productive wood low down in the plant. This will promote healthy new young growth for future displays – Renewal Pruning.

Winter/early spring flowering

Viburnum x bodnatense



Forsythia cultivars



Spring and early summer flowering

Deutzia cultivars



Philadelphus cultivars



Weigela cultivars



Summer and late summer flowering shrubs

Buddleja davidii



Smaller Tender Shrubs

This group includes Fuchsias, Phygelius and Gaura. Mostly they will survive the winter but need this years growth to protect the buds at the base that will grow the following year. In the case of Gaura and very tender fuchsias they will also need some winter protection.

Fuchsia



Phygelius



Gaura



Plants Grown for Stem Colour

A number of trees have brightly coloured one year old stems. These can be grown as shrubs and pollarded every year or every other year to

encourage bright coloured young growth for winter colour. Most common and cultivars of Cornus (Dogwood) and Salix (Willow).

In order to ensure good colour the stems are cut back hard at the end of winter before growth starts. Plants should then be fed well to sustain good growth for the following year.

Cornus



Salix



Shrubs Grown for Bright Coloured Leaves

A number of deciduous and evergreen shrubs have brightly coloured young foliage in the spring which can be enhanced by pruning hard just before growth starts. These include some Spiraea's (Deciduous) and Photinia Red Robin (Evergreen).

Spiraea japonica Gold Flame



Photinia Red Robin



Evergreen Shrubs

Unlike deciduous shrubs evergreens, as a rule, do not require regular pruning to stimulate new growth and flowers and fruit. Although they are clothed all year evergreens do lose their leaves when they reach three or four years old and an inspection of the inside of a bush will reveal

bare stems. Consequently if you try to stimulate new growth by removing a number of branches all you do is create unsightly gaps in the canopy.

If it is done regularly you regulate the size of an evergreen shrub by cutting back within the leaf area. Otherwise with many flowering plants that outgrow their allotted space the advice is to cut them back hard in the spring to within eighteen inches of the ground. Most will then grow back up from there. Examples include:

Rhododendron

Mahonia

Choisya

Pruning a rhododendron that is too large for its allocated space.



Before pruning in April



After pruning 12
Months later



Flowering 2 years
later



Hard pruning on a larger plant.

Ken Turner – November 2013