



Caring for deciduous shrubs

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DECIDUOUS SHRUBS, unlike conifers, lose their leaves in winter. These shrubs are used in landscape plantings for their flower display, foliage coloration, character and color of twigs, fruits for winter color, and food for birds.

Like most landscape plants, deciduous shrubs need the right care at planting and regular maintenance to keep them healthy and attractive.

Planting

Bare root stock

Soak the root system of bare root stock in water overnight before planting. Then plant the new shrub in a large hole with the roots spread out. Do not add commercial fertilizer in the hole unless it is a slow-release fertilizer in pre-measured packet or pill form. Next, refill the hole with soil to the same depth at which the shrub was originally planted in the nursery. Press the soil firmly around the shrub roots and then soak the soil with water.

In addition, prune any broken branches and the weaker of any two conflicting branches.

Balled and burlapped stock

Dig the planting hole the same depth as the ball and about one foot wider. After setting the ball into the hole, carefully remove twine and burlap and replace the soil. Prune any broken branches and the weaker of any two conflicting branches.

Container-grown and potted stock

Carefully remove the plant with the root ball intact from papier mache, plastic, or metal containers before planting. If roots appear matted around the surface, spread the roots out with your fingers or cut roots that are wound in spiral fashion at the base of the container. This encourages new root development into the surrounding soil.

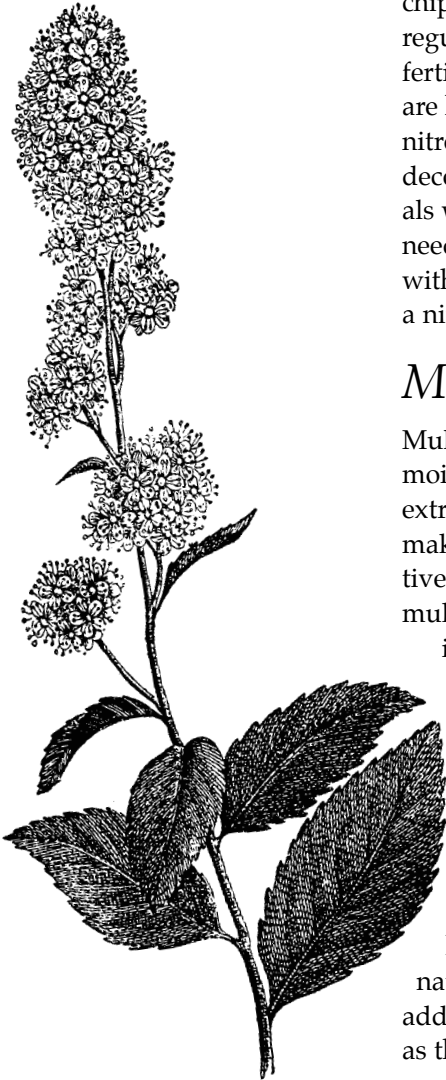
Prune any broken branches and the weaker of any two conflicting branches.

Watering

Water deciduous shrubs thoroughly and regularly the first year following planting. However, once established, most deciduous shrubs need little watering. A good soaking once a week during dry periods should be plenty.

Fertilizing

Apply fertilizer to shrubs in late fall or early spring. Most shrubs make only one flush of growth each year and that tends to end in early to midsummer. Fertilizer applied in summer can cause new growth that may be injured in winter. Since many shrubs initiate flower buds in midsummer or later, fertilizer applied late in the season may also reduce the number of flower buds formed.



Use a commercial fertilizer high in nitrogen—such as 16-8-8 or 21-0-0—and apply 4 oz/ft of the shrub's height or spread. Where shrubs are planted in beds of bare soil, apply 2 lb (2 pt)/100 ft² of bed area.

Apply fertilizer properly to reduce maintenance and pruning. Generally, the more fertilizer you use, the more plant growth you get. Apply fertilizer annually when plants are small and rapid vegetative growth is desired. As plants reach desired size, reduce or eliminate fertilizer to limit growth.

Shrub plantings mulched with organic mulches such as wood chips and shredded bark require regular applications of nitrogen fertilizer because these materials are high in carbon, but low in nitrogen. Soil organisms decomposing these mulch materials will obtain the nitrogen they need from the soil—in competition with shrubs—and this may induce a nitrogen deficiency.

Mulching

Mulches can conserve soil moisture, reduce soil temperature extremes, help control weeds, and make shrub plantings more attractive. For best effectiveness, most mulch material should be 2–4 inches deep around the plant.

Many organic materials can be used as mulches including shredded bark, wood or bark chips, shredded leaves, hay, straw, grain or cocoa hulls, pine needles, and ground corncobs. Organic mulches have the advantage of being natural in appearance while adding organic matter to the soil as they decompose.

Some inorganic materials that are used for mulching include sand, crushed stone, gravel chips, and pebbles. You should place a weed barrier fabric beneath inorganic mulches to control weeds.

Controlling insects and diseases

To help control insects and diseases, remove old and diseased wood each year, and rake and destroy fallen leaves in autumn.

For information on identifying insect and disease problems and their control for specific shrubs, call your county Extension office.

Pruning

Prune for one or more of these reasons:

- To remove old and diseased parts.
- To increase flower and fruit production.
- To enhance bark coloration.
- To make shrubs more vigorous and dense at the base.
- To formalize the shrub outline.
- To remove conflicting branches.

In shrubs, the most vigorous growth is usually at the terminal buds found at the ends of branches. When you prune terminal buds, more side shoots or lateral buds develop making the shrub bushier. Pruning branches back to the ground stimulates major growth at the base of the shrub.

Remember, pruning encourages growth, so cut only where you need growth. Study the character of your shrubs and try to preserve it when pruning.

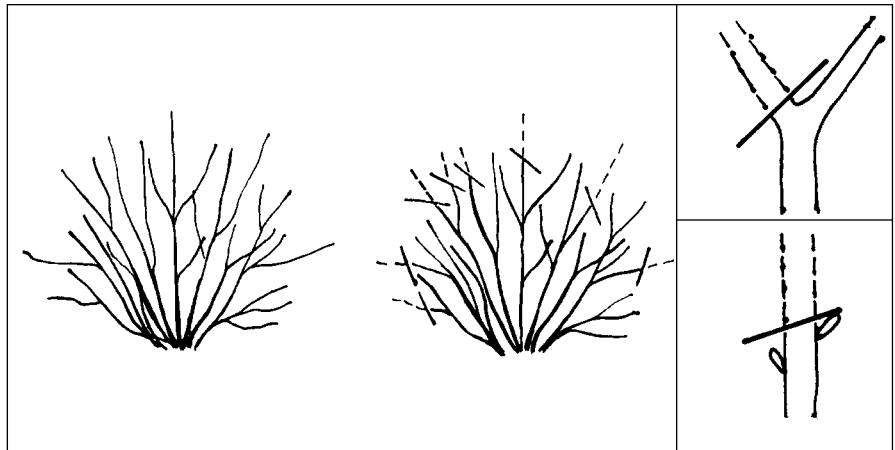
When to prune

Generally, the ideal time to prune is near the end of the dormant season, just before growth starts in spring. However, shrubs that bloom in early spring, such as flowering quince and forsythia, can be pruned just after their blooming period. These shrubs bloom on wood produced the year before, so pruning right after bloom helps produce a maximum amount of flower-producing wood.

Summer flowering shrubs, such as Annabelle hydrangea and Bumalda spirea, bloom on wood produced that same year. These shrubs can be cut to the ground before growth starts in the spring.

Note: Severe pruning—such as removal of all old, heavy canes—should only be done when shrubs are dormant in winter or early spring.

PRUNING FOR FORMAL SHRUBS



How to prune

Renewal pruning of most shrubs

Allow shrubs to retain their natural form through regular renewal pruning. Remove the oldest, heaviest canes at ground level. This stimulates new vigorous shoots at the base of the plant, preventing “legginess” (bare base and dense top) and eventually replacing unattractive old canes. If

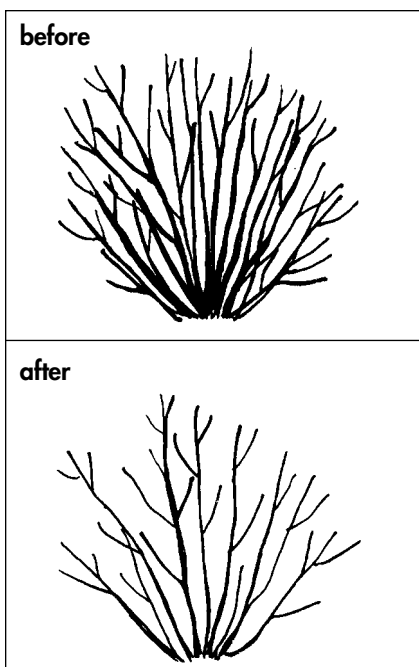
the shrub is very overgrown and has few young canes, remove only one-third of the old canes at a time.

Formal shrubs

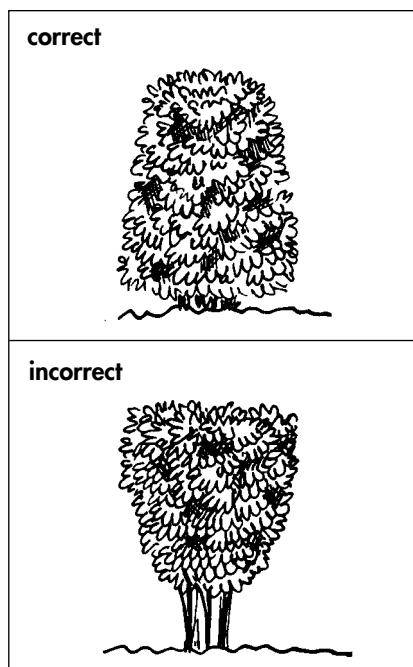
Prune back the branch tips of smaller types of shrubs to produce compact, bushy plants. Use hand pruning shears rather than hedge shears, and cut back long branches selectively. When possible, prune back to side buds and make cuts at a slant (see illustrations above).

To change the shrub’s shape, cut back to where a branch, twig, or side bud grows in the direction you want the plant to grow.

RENEWAL PRUNING



PRUNING FOR HEDGES



Hedges

Shear hedges so the top is narrower than the bottom. This allows more light to reach lower leaves so they stay green and vigorous and the hedge remains dense at the base. In addition, a hedge with a wide top is more likely to break down under heavy wet snow.

You can rejuvenate old hedges that are overgrown and leggy by renewal pruning. After removing the oldest and heaviest canes, prune the remaining younger canes back to about one-third their original height.

Pruning suggestions for several common shrubs

Cotoneaster

Cut out old or diseased wood at ground level.

Dogwoods

Cut out old and discolored canes at ground level.

Euonymus (Burningbush)

Reshape when needed by selectively cutting back the most vigorous branches to major side branches. Don't prune at ground level, because this shrub grows with one trunk like a tree.

Forsythia

Cut out 3-year-old wood to the base just after flowers have faded.

Honeysuckle

Renewal prune to promote new growth at base. You can cut the entire plant to the ground during the dormant season.

Lilac

Remove old flower parts after bloom. Renewal prune when needed.

Mockorange

Renewal prune when needed.

Potentilla

Cut back entire plant halfway to the ground and selectively remove old canes at ground level.

Spireas (Bumalda and Japanese)

Cut back entire plant halfway to the ground and selectively remove old canes at ground level.

Viburnums

Remove old wood to ground level. Some viburnums grow slowly and need little pruning.



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