

Prune Early-flowering Shrubs After They Bloom

Maintenance Pruning

By relying on a few timely, well-placed cuts, you can keep your deciduous trees and shrubs healthy.

Gardeners often spend hours pruning their trees and shrubs in order to control size and shape, but pruning can do more than dictate a plant's stature. Regular selective pruning, or maintenance pruning, is also a way to keep woody plants healthy and productive. One aim of maintenance pruning is to protect your woody plants from pests and disease, which can gain entry into a plant through dead wood, broken branches, and wounds caused by branches that are rubbing together. By thoughtfully cutting back tips, branches, limbs, and stems, you can also encourage youthful growth that produces abundant flowers and fruits as well as prevent the spread of pests and disease. Knowing where to begin with maintenance pruning can seem overwhelming since there are so many different trees and shrubs to consider. But by following three basic guidelines - knowing what, where, and when to cut - you will be successful in all of your deciduous tree and shrub pruning endeavors.

Early-flowering shrubs form their flower buds on the previous year's growth, and removing any stems before they bloom means you're removing potential blossoms, as well. But don't delay pruning too long after flowering since these shrubs need sufficient time before autumn to fully develop next year's flower buds. Here are just a few:

- Common lilacs (*Syringa vulgaris* and cultivars)
- Deciduous azaleas (*Rhododendron* spp. and cultivars)
- Forsythias (*Forsythia* spp. and cultivars)
- Ninebarks (*Physocarpus opulifolius* and cultivars)
- Viburnums (*Viburnum* spp. and cultivars)
- Weigelas (*Weigela* spp. and cultivars)

There's a right way and a wrong way to cut

When pruning trees and shrubs always make an angled cut just above and sloping away from a viable bud. Buds are located immediately above the point where a leaf is attached to a branch or, if the plant is dormant and leafless, above the leaf scar (a mark left on a branch where the leaf was once attached).

Be careful not to cut too close to the bud. This will damage the bud, causing it to dry out and die - leaving a dead stub. And don't cut too far above a bud, either, because the stub that remains will eventually die, rot away, and provide a possible entryway for disease.