

# PRUNING FLOWERING SHRUBS

*By Carol Ponchet-Cassidy*

## TOOLS:

- Sharpen
- Disinfect with a 10% bleach solution
- Treat with a lubricant such as WD40

## THEORY:

- Identify whether the shrub is spring bloom or summer bloom
- Principles of pruning : allow light to get into the plant
- Plant growth habit and mature size
- Age of flowering wood
- Pruning for flower, decorative fruit, foliage or winter bark
- Pruning strong wood vs. weak wood
- Pruning for new shoots
- Pruning cuts
- Suckers
- Early training

## ASSESSMENT:

### A - Training style

- Multi-stemmed
- Framework
- Pollard

### B - Dead or damaged wood

### C - General health

- Insect
- Disease
- Growth
- Soil

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## PRUNING:

### A – Forsythia (Spring Bloom)

\*NOTE: Blooms on last year's wood. Can be hedged after bloom as well as freestanding.

- After bloom, thin out oldest stems by up to 1/3.
- Cut back remaining stems to a vigorous side branch or a strong pair of buds.

*List of plants pruned similarly:*

Deutzia  
Kolkwitzia  
Ribes  
Tamarix

Kerria  
Philadelphus  
Spiraea thunbergii  
Weigela

### B – Buddleia (Summer Bloom)

\*NOTE: Blooms on current season's wood. Maintain a basic framework.

- Prune early, i.e. Feb.
- Cut back all of last year's growth to 2 - 3 buds.
- Thin out/reshape older stems as needed.

*List of plants pruned similarly:*

Caryopteris  
Hardy Fuchsia  
Hydrangea paniculata  
Lavatera  
Hardy Hibiscus

Ceratostigma  
Perovskia  
Spiraea spp.  
(bumalda, crispa, japonica & douglasii)

### C – Magnolia (Spring Bloom)

\*NOTE: Blooms on last year's wood. New growth is produced at the perimeter on a permanent framework of older branches.

- Prune after flowering.
- Maintain basic framework.
- Remove any crossing, crowded, weak or twiggy branches.
- As a shrub form, thin out older wood as needed.
- To shorten a branch, cut back to a vigorous side branch or bud.

*List of plants pruned similarly:*

Amelanchier  
Viburnum

Hamamelis

## **D - Cornus** (Red and Yellow Twig Dogwood)

\*NOTE: Generally grown for its bright, colorful, winter bark. Can be trained as a multi-stemmed shrub from ground level or from a low basic framework.

- March/April, cut back all of last year's growth to 2 - 3 buds.
- Thin out any of the older wood as needed.

*List of plants pruned similarly:*

Salix

Sambucus

Kerria

## **E – Syringa (Lilac) (Spring Bloom)**

\*Note: Blooms on last year's wood.

- Prune immediately after flowering.
- Remove all spent flowers.
- Thin out older stems and shape as needed.
- If too tall, gradually drop the height 1/3 at a time over several years.

## **F – Hydrangea (Summer Bloom)**

\*Note: Because of the popularity of Hydrangeas in this area, I've chosen to detail the 2 different pruning approaches.

**1 - Hydrangea macrophylla** (includes mopheads, lace caps and oak leaf)

- In March, remove any dead or old wood, as well as any weak or twiggy branches.
- Shorten remaining branches to either a "strong" pair of buds or to a vigorous side branch.

**2 - Hydrangea paniculata, Hydrangea arborescens** (smooth and Peegee)

\*Note: Blooms on current season's growth. Can be trained either as a multi-stemmed shrub from ground level or from a low basic framework.

- Thin out any of the older wood as needed.
- Remove any dead, diseased, crowded, weak or twiggy branches.
- Prune all of last year's growth back to 2 - 3 buds.

## **G - Rhododendron**

\*Note: If sufficient room is available, these broad-leaved evergreens should be allowed to develop with only minor pruning.

- Immediately after bloom, remove all seed heads left behind.
- Dead, diseased or poorly growing shoots can be removed at any time of year.
- Pruning for shape is best done April/May. This allows the new growth to develop and 'harden off' before winter.

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*List of evergreen plants pruned similarly:*

Camelia	Magnolia grandiflora	
Azalea	Hebe	Boxwood

## **H - Hedge**

\*Note: The following applies to broad-leaved evergreen and conifer hedges.

- Best pruned in March/April or when all danger of frost is passed.
- Can be trimmed every 4 - 6 weeks if desired, until September.
- Base of hedge should be slightly wider and taper in gently towards the top.

*List of evergreen plants pruned similarly:*

Boxwood	Escalonia
Privet	

\*Note: Pyracantha and Cotoneaster are best pruned in July after bloom and while new growth is developing.

## **1 - Rose**

\*Note: This section will address each of the basic rose groups, i.e. Modern Roses, Antique Roses, Climbers and Ramblers.

Have no fear! Roses are very resilient and forgiving to pruning error.

**1 - Modern Roses** (This group includes Hybrid Teas, Floribundas, Miniatures and Shrubs)

- Prune between late February and mid. March (or when Forsythia is in bloom).
- Wear gloves!
- Identify graft union. If any stems are emerging below union, remove them. These are root stock "sports".
- Remove at least 1/3 of the wood completely, selecting the oldest, weakest, crossing, crowded or dead canes first.
- Ideally, you will be left with 4 or more strong young canes.
- Drop height of plant by approx. ½ . Cut, if possible, to just above a bud pointing away from the center of the plant.
- Cuts should slope in the same direction as the bud. If it's a stout cane, you may wish to dab some sealant on the cut to prevent borers from entering.

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## 2 - Antique Roses

\*Note: These roses bloom on last year's growth, mainly in June-July. Some may repeat bloom in the fall. These roses should be permitted to develop a natural framework. When in doubt about pruning, don't.

- Prune late Feb/mid Mar.
- Remove any dead, diseased, crossing, crowded, weak, twiggy or damaged wood.
- After bloom, shorten any long or irregularly growing canes.

\*Note: Another option with any long canes that develop is a technique called "Pinning down". Instead of shortening after bloom, bend the long cane down and attach the tip to a peg driven into the ground. This look's odd, but lots of new growth will develop off of this cane and bloom for you next year.

\*Note: More vigorous varieties of Shrub Roses can be pruned similar to Antique Roses.

## 3 - Climbers and Ramblers

\*Note: These roses bloom on current season's growth called "laterals" which are produced on the long main canes.

### a – Climbers

- Thin out any dead, diseased, weak or crowded wood.
- In late February/ mid. March shorten all laterals to 2 - 3 buds or leaves.
- If long main canes need to be shortened cut back to a strong lateral.
- Bend and tie long main canes out horizontally to encourage more flowering.

### b - Ramblers

\*Note: These roses have one main flush of bloom.

- Generally allowed to grow naturally on fences, trellises, etc.
- In early spring, any long vertical shoots can be either removed (hedgers are great) or bent down horizontally and tied.
- Remove any dead wood.
- Thin out canes if possible and if desired.

I highly recommend the book «Pruning » by Christopher Brickell !

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