



Pruning Fact Sheet

You should have seen the look on Doug's face when I suggested he write a fact sheet on pruning a few Sundays ago. The comment was inspired by some work Doug has done in my garden, when he cut most of my fig tree down to make way for a new fence. But how did he know when to prune and how much to cut off? I think that's what puzzles me most. Even as a member of the Royal Horticultural Society!

Anyway, without further ado I will hand you over to Doug, I hope you find his advice useful, but if you've got any more questions do give us a call on Sunday mornings.

I hope to be speaking with you on-air soon.

Blair Jacobs

You know, since he joined the Royal Horticultural Society at Tatton Park Flower Show, I have to admit that Blair's garden has gone from strength to strength. Only the other day he was showing me with great pride all the plants he has put in, a hanging basket he had made, and yes they had all survived, even thrived!

Which shows just one thing - plants are much hardier than we give them credit for!

Take pruning for example, we worry so much about taking a delicate pair of secateurs to our prize shrub, yet in the wild all sorts of beasts would have chewed bits off while grazing, and they would have survived fine.

In fact I can only think of two shrubs that I have killed by pruning them a little too enthusiastically. One was Lavender, which only likes a very light trim in August. The other was a Broom which had grown very large, so I cut it down to 1 foot so it could re-grow. That was the last I ever saw of it.

1. Tools and equipment

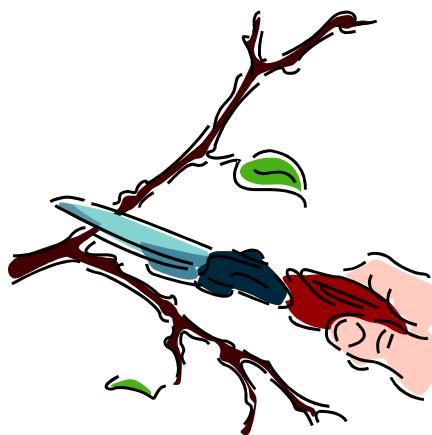
This seems like a good place to start, and the good news is that very few tools are needed. A good sharp pair of secateurs are however essential, an old kitchen knife, however expertly used will never work as well as good secateurs. I prefer the ones that work like scissors, as the anvil ones can squash the wood you are cutting, which can lead to die back and disease getting into cuts.

For larger shrubs some loppers or long arm pruners are useful, as is a small sharp pointed saw.

2. Why we prune

We prune for a number of different reasons,

- ◆ To remove damaged growth, for example a branch that has broken off during mowing, or some shoots that have been damaged by frost.
- ◆ To encourage plants to become bushy, seedlings are often “pinched” to encourage bushy side growth. Shrubs like Buddleja and Lavatera respond in the same way
- ◆ Sometimes we prune and train to encourage flowering, as the old growth on Raspberries and Rambling Roses does not flower we remove it before winter. Then with the roses we have found out that if we train the growth along a horizontal support you get much more flower than if growing up a vertical support.



and a good hard pruning in the spring to a foot or so from the ground will prevent them from being tall and gangly.

- ◆ Sometimes adult growth is unattractive, Eucalyptus gunnii needs to be kept cut back to keep the attractive juvenile growth, and Dogwood needs to be cut back down to the ground in early spring, to encourage strong new shoots, that will look wonderful with their coloured bark the following winter. (OK I can't resist this joke, why is it called Dogwood – wait for it – because of the bark!) (sorry)

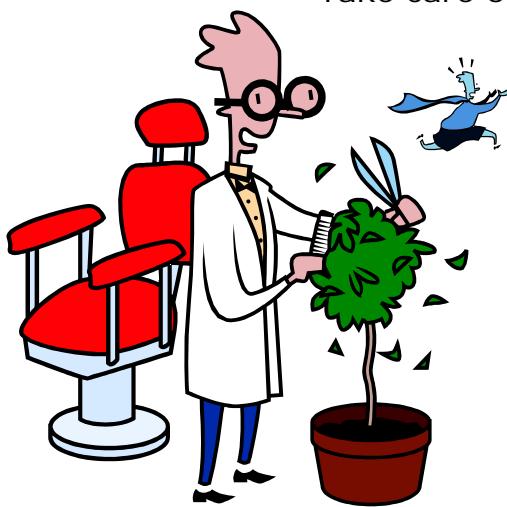
3. The rules

- ◆ Only use sharp tools, so that you get clean cuts that heal fast.
- ◆ Never leave a stub, always cut a branch or a shoot back to where it grows from. Leaving a few inches as a stump can lead to die back.
- ◆ A good rule of thumb is to wait until after flowering to carry out pruning.
- ◆ The harder you cut an enthusiastic plant back, the harder and faster it will re-grow, so gently does it with vigorous plants.
- ◆ Always remember the three Ds. Cut out the dead wood first, then any damaged wood and finally any wood with disease.
- ◆ Never prune when the weather is very cold, or when a hard frost is forecast.

4. Take care

Always take care when pruning and seek help or

advice if you need it. Pruning can involve ladders or steps and working at height with sharp blades is dangerous. We also often prune on cold days, when it's easy to catch your fingers in the secateurs. Take care of getting poked in the eye by branches, eye protection may seem over the top, but few people who get poked in the eye are glad they didn't put goggles on!



Tetanus is always a risk when gardening, are you up to date with your injections?

Some plants exude sap which can irritate, so it is always best to check in a book first or cover up and wear gloves.

5. Disposing of prunings

Soft prunings can be composted. (I had to find a mentioned!) Woody prunings need to be chomped up; if you have a lot of woody prunings then a shredder will be worth its weight in gold!

If the wood is diseased then it is best not to compost it and another method of disposal should be found.

6. How and when

Below is an alphabetical list of the plants we get most questions about

Apple

There are two types of apple, tip bearing and spur bearing.

Tip bearing varieties should have the three D treatment, (Dead, Diseased & Damaged wood removed) and if mature have some of the leaders, the taller branches, cut back. Laterals (side branches) should be left alone as they will have the fruit buds at their tips.

Spur bearing varieties should have the same three D treatment, remove branches and laterals that are crossing and making the centre of the tree congested. If the tree starts to give a lot of small fruit then it needs more of the wood removing as it overstretched.

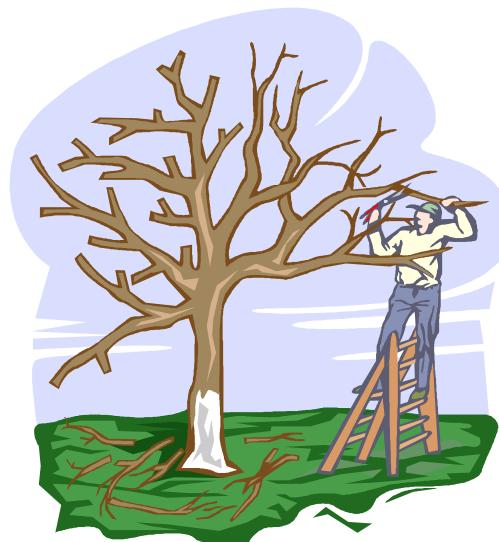
Apple – Minarette and trained trees

These need to be summer pruned. The top shoot should

be reduced in length and the side growth should be pruned

Berberis

Damaged wood can be pruned back at almost any time of the year



Blackberries

Ideally these will be grown on a support like Raspberries. Just like Raspberries the fruited canes are removed at the end of the year and the new canes tied in.

Blackcurrants

Prune in the winter starting 2 – 3 years after planting. Cut out 1/3 of the old wood every year, so the bush is basically replaced every 3 or 4 years.

Buddleja

These should be pruned to about half their height in November and then down to within a foot or so of the ground in the spring.

Camellia

Does not require pruning, damaged branches can be removed any time.

Clematis

The time and method of pruning depends on when they flower.

Spring flowering varieties like Montana should be given a light pruning after flowering has finished.

Summer flowering varieties like Nelly Moser should be given a light prune in early spring.

The autumn flowering varieties, including the viticella group should be pruned to the ground in early spring.

Dogwood

To keep the ornamental stems looking their best cut back to the ground in March.

Fig

Fan trained trees should be pruned to keep them in a fan shape in June. All the young shoots should be pinched back to 5 leaves, which may seem harsh, but will produce lots of fruiting shoots.

Figs grown as bushes should be pruned during the winter in a similar way to apples.



On both tree types the fruits should be thinned out in September, ripe ones should have been picked, the new ones should be small, any that are the size of mint imperials or aniseed balls should be removed as they will not ripen.

Forsythia

Do not over prune this shrub. After flowering remove one main branch if it is a large plant, and cut back only those shoots that have faded blooms.

Gooseberries

During the winter take out the three Ds (Diseased, Damaged & Dead) wood and try to open out the centre to let light in (and your hands for picking!). New growth should be cut back by about half. If there are a lot of laterals they can be cut back to about 2 or 3 inches of the main stem.

Honeysuckle

Remove unwanted growth after flowering. If it has got full of dead wood and is looking unsightly, this is the

time to remove a lot of the old growth by giving it a good hack back.

Hydrangea

Remove dead flower-heads in March. Remove weak branches in April.

Jasmine

Very little pruning is required. Dead stems can be cut back any time; a light pruning can be given after flowering to keep it under control.

Lavender

Lightly prune in August as flowering ends. Do not cut into old wood.

Lilac

Remove unwanted branches and thin spindly growth after flowering.

Raspberries

The summer fruiting Raspberries should have the fruiting canes removed in early autumn, allowing the new growth to be securely tied in to the support system to protect it over the winter.

The autumn fruiting raspberries should be pruned differently, by cutting all the growth, (new and old canes) to the ground during the

winter in February or early March.

Weigela

Cut back shoots that have faded flowers as soon as flowering is over.

Viburnum

Pruning is not required, damaged growth should be removed when seen, but no other pruning is required.

Virginia Creeper

Any unwanted growth can be removed in the spring. If it is becoming invasive, it can be pruned back in all but the midst of winter.

Wisteria

The long curly growth can be cut back in August to about 6 inches, or a couple of buds. These will then grow and bear the flowers the following year.

Well, that's about all that we have room for, I hope you find this fact sheet useful. If it gets covered in soil and sap then it will have done its job well.

Happy gardening!

Doug