

York County Office  
100 County Drive, PO Box 532,  
Yorktown, Virginia 23690-0532  
757.890.4940/ Fax: 757.890.4033  
E-mail: [ex199@vt.edu](mailto:ex199@vt.edu)  
<http://offices.ext.vt.edu/york>  
[www.yorkcounty.gov/vce](http://www.yorkcounty.gov/vce)

## CALENDAR FOR PRUNING LANDSCAPE TREES AND SHRUBS FOR THE VIRGINIA PENINSULA

The following information will guide you through the pruning process. There are BEST times to prune and we captured those times in this calendar. You can prune dead, diseased, damaged or dangerous plant parts throughout the year. (See page 3) Attend a free onsite pruning clinic sponsored by Extension in February.

**January** Prune and bring in longer branch cuttings from forsythia, pussy willow, and other early spring flowering shrubs. Placed in water, the warmer temperatures indoors can force bloom.

**February** An excellent month to prune most plants. Do not prune spring flowering plants. Prune shade trees; trees will "bleed" which will not hurt them. Prune tree and small fruit. Prune lateral branches 1/4" above the bud at a 45 degree angle. Do not cut off the branch collar on trees. (See page 4) Prune hybrid tea and grandiflora roses to 3 or 4 strong canes 18 inches long by *February 15*. Prune summer blooming plants such as crape myrtle, vitex, and butterfly bush. Prune santolina back hard; thin nandina stalks and reduce canes by 1/3. Spray a horticultural dormant oil (follow label for temperatures) on plants to reduce pest population. Remove all debris, including fallen leaves, from area. Put 3-4 inches of mulch around plants. Keep mulch off of plant stem (collar).

**March** "Rejuvenation" pruning, to reduce the size of overgrown broadleaf evergreens should be done the earlier part of this month. If need be, cut well-established plants back to within 12-18 inches of the ground. Fertilize and water. This can be done to gardenia, hollies, ligustrum, nandina, photinia, pyracantha, and other broadleaf evergreens. Refer to the publications listed on the reverse, on other plants because they do not tolerate drastic pruning. Drastic pruning on spring flowering plants now will eliminate spring flowering.

**April** Azaleas and other spring flowering plants, such as forsythia, are pruned **immediately after they bloom**. Prune by the renewal method. (See page 4) These plants should not be sheared. Complete pruning by June 1. Mow or cutback evergreen ground covers such as English ivy, vinca major, vinca minor, ajuga, liriope, and mondo [at the highest mower setting > 4 inches]. Do not prune summer flowering plants. These should have been pruned in February. Pruning now will prevent their bloom because they bloom on the current seasons growth.

[www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu)

Extension is a joint program of Virginia Tech, Virginia State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and state and local governments.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

- May** To achieve dense growth on pines, break or cut the new "candles" in half. Pinch annuals to induce branching. Start pinching mums and continue until July 15 for spray types. For large specimen mum blooms, grow 1 to 3 stems per plant and disbud to one bud later in the season.
- June** Keep faded flowers of annuals and some perennials picked for continuous bloom. Prune climbing roses immediately after blooming. Keep roses open for light and air penetration.
- July** Light pruning only if any. Heavy pruning will cause stimulation and late season growth that will not be winter hardy. **Cut back** scraggly annuals such as petunia, and **fertilize** for bloom until frost. **Clip** sheared hedges and screens regularly to maintain the desired size - always taper their growth from narrow at the top to broad at the base. Thin out hedges to allow light penetration. (See page 4)
- August** **Disbud** mums and camellias. Pruning activities on shrubs and trees are on a "have to" basis. Late pruning can stimulate new growth, especially on the peninsula with our late summers.
- September** **Disbud** camellias for larger bloom. **Halt** pruning on all shrubs and trees; the new growth induced by fall pruning is susceptible to winter injury. **Root prune** plants to be moved next year, to encourage development of a fibrous root system and reduce planting shock.
- October** No drastic pruning this month. Check trees and shrubs and remove any dead or diseased wood.
- November** **Prune** perennials such as phlox and asparagus to the ground to remove dead stalks and attached insect eggs and diseases. **Prune** back whips on roses to about 4-6 feet; do heavy pruning in February.
- December** Lightly **Prune** evergreens for use as Christmas decorations.
- Anytime** **Remove** dead or diseased wood from any tree or shrub. **Prune** the weaker of two rubbing or interfacing branches. Take care not to make bark wounds. **Remove** watersprouts on limbs or suckers at base of plants. Always use the proper tool and make sure it's sharp and clean. Never leave stubs or ragged cuts. Never use pruning paint; let wound heal naturally. Be sure to leave the branch collar.

---

**For further information, contact your local extension office for the following pruning publications or go to [www.ext.vt.edu](http://www.ext.vt.edu).**

**Pruning Series**

- [430-455 Pruning Basics and Tools](#)
- [430-456 Pruning Deciduous Trees](#)
- [430-457 Pruning Evergreen Trees](#)
- [430-458 Stop Topping Trees](#)
- [430-459 Pruning Shrubs](#)
- [430-460 Deciduous Tree Pruning Calendar](#)
- [430-461 Evergreen Tree Pruning Calendar](#)
- [430-462 Shrub Pruning Calendar](#)
- [422-021 Training and Pruning Apple Trees](#)
- [426-840 Small Fruit in the Home Garden](#)
- [426-841 Tree Fruit in the Home Garden](#)

© York County Cooperative Extension

James M. Orband, Senior  
Extension Agent Emeritus  
Daniel Nortman, Extension Agent,  
Agriculture & Natural Resources,  
York County

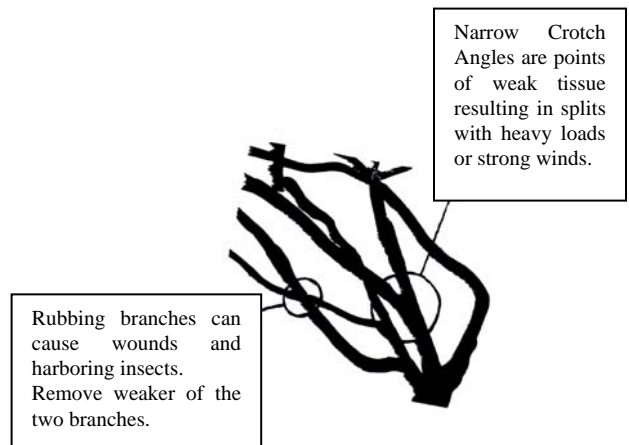
**Revised 2011**

## Pruning Ornamental Trees and Shrubs

Pruning can be divided into a three step task: 1) determine the reason for pruning, 2) choose a method that will suit the purpose, and 3) prune. Sharp tools and a clear understanding of some basic principles are invaluable aids.

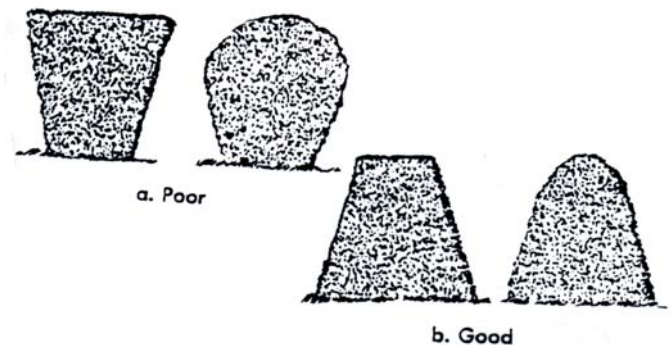
### Why Prune?

- **To train young plants** - Young trees need pruning/training to establish a strong scaffold of major branches and to remove crossing branches and narrow-angle crotches.
- **To maintain tree and shrub health** - Thinning lets light penetrate into the center of the plant, encouraging healthy growth of inner and lower branches. Renewal pruning of older wood encourages new growth that conducts nutrients effectively.
- **To remove dead, diseased, or damaged branches** - This category is the major exception to the rules on when pruning should be done. Diseased areas should be removed as soon as the disease is noticed to stop the disease from spreading in the plant. Remember to cut off the section well beyond (6 - 12 inches) the part that is obviously affected so that all of the disease is removed.
- **To reduce size** - An overgrown plant may be reduced by heading back, or thinning. However, select the proper plant to ensure that the mature height of the plant will not exceed the landscape location. This will reduce the need for reductive pruning.
- **To develop a special form** - Hedges, espalier, and topiary forms are created by pruning to change the natural shape of the plant.



### Shaping bushes and hedges

The best hedge shapes are those which allow light to reach the lower part of the plant. Taper sides of hedge to attain the shape of wide at the base and narrow at the top. Informal shapes do not require frequent clipping.



### Pruning Methods

Correct pruning can be broken down into two questions: when? and how? Fortunately a few basic rules apply for almost all plants. Non-flowering and summer flowering trees and shrubs should be pruned when they are dormant. February is generally the ideal time. However, spring flowering trees and shrubs should be pruned just after they finish blooming because they set their flowers buds in the previous summer and winter pruning will remove these buds. There are three basic methods of pruning: 1) Heading back, 2) Thinning out, and 3) Renewal pruning. (See page 4)

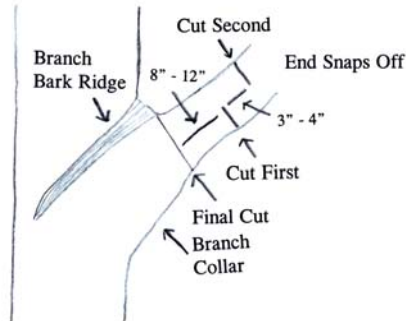
## PRUNING PRACTICES AND METHODS

### HEADING CUTS

#### (HEADING BACK)

This is cutting off the end of a shoot, reducing the plant size and encouraging it to grow fuller. Always cut back to about 1/4" above a bud or branch. This pruning method is good for shaping trees and bushes as the direction of new growth can be influenced by where the cut is made. If the end bud is left on the inside of the branch, the new growth will be inward, if the bud is on the outside of the branch, the new growth will be away from the rest of the plant.

### Pruning Cuts Made in the Proper Order



Prune to a branch collar. The resulting wound will heal efficiently and reduce opportunities for rot.

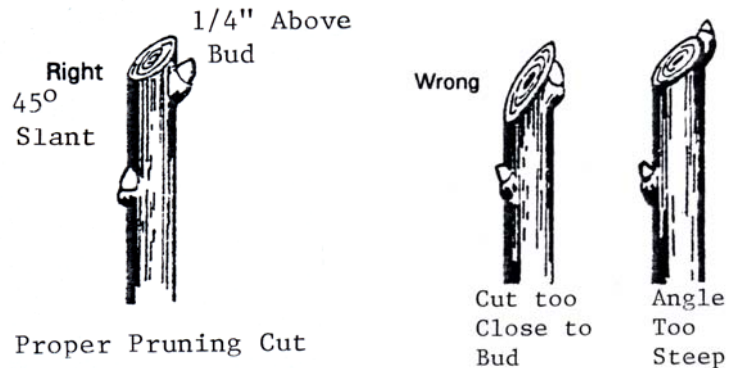
**\* NO PRUNING PAINT OR OTHER PRODUCTS ON PRUNING WOUNDS**

### THINNING

#### (THINNING OUT)

To thin a plant, remove branches by cutting them back to the point where they join the parent stem. This method of pruning is used to encourage the inner part of needle-bearing plants to maintain their needles and to promote leaves in the inner sections of other trees and shrubs. Thinning out can also be used to reduce plant density by selectively thinning out crowding branches.

### Proper & Improper Pruning Cuts



### REDUCTION

#### (RENEWAL PRUNING)

Renewal pruning is the removal of the oldest branches of a shrub by cutting them off at or near ground level, leaving only young vigorous branches. It is most often used with shrubs that grow in a cane form. Most deciduous shrubs can be rejuvenated by pruning branches at about 18" above the ground.

### What to Remove

Remove all broken or dead branches on the tree. Remove infected and infested branches. Remove low hanging, dangerous branches.

Damaged Branches

Dead Branches

Diseased Branches

