Pruning Shrubs

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Why Do We Prune Plants?

- To remove damaged/broken branches
- To remove rubbing, crossing, inwardly growing branches
- For visibility & safety considerations
- To train young plants
Why We Prune Plants (cont’d)

- Control plant size
- Rejuvenation of plants
- Increase flowering, fruiting and vigor
Continued shearing thinned plants in the middle, produces suckers from stress, and flower buds are continuously sheared off at top.
Pruning Shrubs

• Maintenance begins at planting.
• Shrub maintenance should begin before the plant reaches the desired size.
• During the first growing season, thin fast growing shrubs out.
• Reducing the number of stems will help to develop stem girth.
• Fast growing shrubs generally have many shoots originating at the base of the plant and require regular pruning.

• Slow growing shrubs normally have a well defined branch structure, require little training.
When shrubs require continuous pruning, consider removal and replacement with a more suitable plant for the location.

When selecting a plant remember:
Final plant size – Is there enough room for the plant without continuous pruning?
When to prune shrubs?

- **Prune after flowering**
  - Spring blooming shrubs are pruned in early summer.
  - Summer blooming shrubs are pruned in early to mid fall.
Keep pruning to a minimum – unless there is a purpose, don’t prune.

- Visualize what the plant will look like with the branch in question removed.
- Remove about 25-30% of the old branches annually.
- If the plant must be drastically reduced in size, reduce it over a 3-4 year period.
Remove branches on shrubs at varying lengths in order to leave the shrub with a textured natural look. In addition, some branches can be removed at the base of the plant.
• Removal of major branches may open the plant up to sunburn. Gradual thinning throughout the plant prevents this problem.

• Remove dead flowers soon after bloom to reduce seed production and litter when undesired.
Where to cut?

Above a bud when possible. Prevents unsightly stubs that die back.
Why not shear shrubs?

- It looks unnatural.
- It is very labor intensive, requires repeat shearing.
- Flower production is decreased.
- Height is more difficult to control.
- Design intent is lost.

NEVER USE HEDGE SHEARS FOR PRUNING SHRUBS.
Continuous shearing weakens these oleander.
Base is defoliated, no flowers appear.
Sheared Hesperaloe parviflora – somebody paid to have their plant needlessly destroyed.
Minimal pruning at the right time maximizes flowering and aesthetic appeal.
Converting Shrubs to Trees

1. Remove lower branches that do not carry into the top of the plant.

2. You may have to remove several of the main branches.

3. Then prune as you would prune any small tree.
Hedges

Choose evergreen plants with small leaves, short internodes, dense branching and that are able to sprout from old wood.

Keep the number of formal hedges to a minimum because they are labor intensive.
Hedges should be wider at the base than top, otherwise base will defoliate for lack of light.
Shading and continuous shearing causes defoliation and thinness at the base of this hedge.
Formally sheared Xylosma hedge
Informal pomegranate hedge, minimal maintenance required.
Informal Myrtus communis hedge works also well for shearing
Rejuvenating overgrown shrubs

Fast growing plants such as Texas Rangers, Jasmine, Oleander, *Acacia redolens*, etc… can be pruned to within 6 inches of the ground and will re-sprout rapidly.
Rejuvenating overgrown shrubs

- Cut shrubs to 6-12 inches above the ground.
- The stumps will re-sprout in several months.
- Thin out the number of shoots the second year and reduce the overall height by half.
The results will be a full, vigorous, rejuvenated shrub.

Not all species respond positively to this treatment. Fast-growing shrubs typically respond best.
This oleander should be cut at 6-12” above the base for rejuvenation.
Natural shape of desert spoon
Lower leaves are needlessly removed, natural plant form destroyed.
Plant in a wrong place?
New shoots require continuous shearing.
Plant weakened from continuous shearing.
Natural grown Leucophyllum with dense foliage
Continuously sheared Leucophyllum with sparse foliage on the outer perimeter of the canopy.
Pruning summary

- Unless necessary, don’t prune.
- Prune at the right time of year.
- Use the natural growth form of a shrub as a guide for naturalistic pruning.
- Don’t shear unless required for formal hedges.