



# Top Tips For Spring Pruning

Most people struggle with knowing how and when to prune their shrubs. I find that people either hack back different shrubs all at the same time, treating them like a hedge and then finding either the shrubs die or never flower. Other people are so intimidated by their shrubs that they daren't touch them at all and they grow into monsters! They stop you walking down paths or driveways and blocking the light out of your house and garden. So here's a bit of advice for the hackers and the leavers.

There are a few general pruning rules:

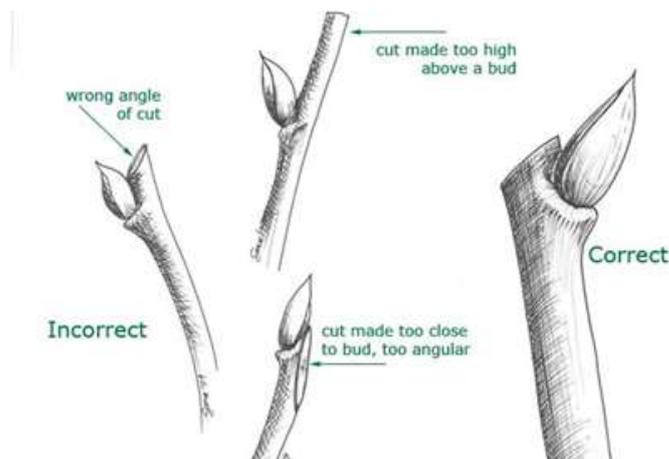
1. Prune most shrubs back AFTER they have flowered, that way you will not be in danger of cutting off next year's flower buds. If your shrubs haven't flowered for a while, leave them alone and wait until they do flower.
2. If you want to reduce the width or height of a shrub remember to cut back a little each year (no more than 30cm/1 foot). If you prune more than this you will just stimulate the shrub to send out more new shoots.
3. Evergreens like Rhododendrons, Camellias, Azaleas, Hebe usually grow in a tidy shape, so just prune them lightly (after they have flowered) to keep them to shape.

To get prepared you need to sort out your **pruning tools** and make sure they are sharp, clean and well oiled.

Also make sure that you are using the right tool for the stems or branches you are cutting; **secateurs** should cut up to 1.5cm diameter, **loppers** up to 3cm diameter and beyond that use a **pruning saw** or **bow saw**. Remember that the right sized tool will cut the stem cleanly so that it heals quickly and does not become infected by bacteria or fungus. Also, well maintained tools mean less effort and strain for you.

Many gardeners are daunted by pruning techniques, but if you keep in mind a few key steps you should be able to tackle basic pruning in your garden.

1. Always prune just above a bud or eye on the stem (where the leaf stalk joined the stem).
2. Make an angled 45 ° cut so the bud is at the highest point of your angle.



3. Choose an outward facing bud to cut above so new growth is encouraged to grow out from the centre of the tree/shrub.
4. Remove any dead, diseased or damaged stems.
5. Remove any stems that cross or rub against each other.
6. For overgrown shrubs remove about one third of the oldest stems down to the base.
7. DON'T prune if it's frosty or a frost is expected soon after you've pruned.

### Shrubs for Spring Pruning

**Hydrangeas** need their flower heads left on over the winter to protect the stems from frost damage. In March, when there is no frost, you can cut off the flower heads back to a healthy pair of buds. If your shrub is well established you should remove one third of the stems right down to the ground – choose the oldest stems and make sure you keep a balanced overall shape.

**Buddlejas** can grow very large, so once they've established keep on top of them! Reduce the length of the flowered stems every autumn to protect the shrub from damage from strong winter winds. In March each year cut back the whole shrub to 90cm/3 foot above the ground and remove any thin, new stems.