

Christina A. Pfeiffer presents:

Rehabilitative Pruning

How to prune previously mal-pruned or storm damaged plants.

Pruning Cuts and Plant Response.

These are the four main pruning cuts:

Branch removal cut – the final cut is made at the point of attachment to a larger stem, at the edge of the branch collar. Previously called a “thinning cut”.

Reduction cut – removal of a branch leader back to a strong lateral branch that is at least one-third the diameter of the stem part being removed - large enough to become the new leader. Previously called “cutting to a lateral”, “selective heading” or “drop-crotch cut”.

Heading and topping cuts - located between nodes, at a bud or node, or at a live branch that is less than one-third the diameter of the removed stem. Topping generally refers to heading cuts made to larger diameter main trunks of trees (not advised for established trees).

Shearing cuts – cutting branch tips and leaves to a desired plane or shape, as for hedges and topiary.

Time of Year and Growth Response

On healthy plants, the strongest and most vigorous growth response occurs after late dormant and early growing season pruning. This is a good time of year for reinvigoration and renovation. Summer pruning - from about mid-July through mid-September - results in a more subdued growth response; it has a dwarfing effect. No hard pruning in summer, keep it to less than ¼ of live material removed.

Common Forms of Mistakes and Mal-Pruning

- Lopping off ends and tip pruning.
- Stubs left at removal cuts.
- Topping trees.
- Extensive tree crown thinning that removes the majority of lower or interior branches.
- Lion-tailing trees (removing all but the end branches along main branches).
- Shearing and rounding over of established natural form ornamental and shade trees.
- Indiscriminate shearing of landscape and natural area shrubs.
- Over-shearing: too frequent and/or removes too much leaf area.

Shrubs That Have Been Sheared or Rounded Over:

Allow some time for new shoot development first. Then stage work over a few seasons, removing about 1/3 of live material per pruning rotation. Natural form will return as new shoots grow and future pruning is done with correct reduction and branch removal cuts.

Staged renovation of multi-stem shrubs:

- Remove old, unproductive and crowded stems.
- Retain a set of existing stems that are left to grow back to natural form
- OR Remove up to 50% of the stems in dormant season, and remove the other half later that year after a new set of strong shoots are established.

Drastic renovation of multi-stem shrubs:

- Cut all stems close to the ground in dormant season, don't leave large stubs.
- Follow up in summer to thin and train new growth.

Staged renovation of tree like shrubs:

- Remove dead branches and stubs to natural points of attachment.
- Thin out dense stem clusters to restore natural form to each branch.
- Opt for a few large cuts over many small cuts.

Drastic renovation of tree-like shrubs with strong epicormic shoot potential:

- Cut back to a short framework of 6 to 8-inch tall stems.
- Follow up to prune for natural form and proper density.
- Rhododendrons, evergreen azaleas, Japanese holly, laurel, *Osmanthus*, boxwood and others.

Restoring Small Garden Trees that have Been Rounded Over or Headed Back

Allow new shoot growth to develop and use selective pruning moving forward.

- Use branch removal cuts and reduction cuts to clean up old tipping or heading cuts.
- Some of the water sprouts that develop on lions-tailed or overthinned trees can be selected for retraining as new interior (not load bearing) branches. Select sprouts growing at an angle; tie vertical to a 45-degree angle if needed.

Large Trees

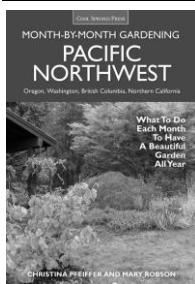
Trees cannot be renovated like shrubs can. Rounding over and topping don't work and can permanently harm tree structure and health. Canopy size may be reduced with selective pruning that preserves the natural structure. Hire an ISA Certified Arborist® for large tree care and pruning needs. Visit www.treesaregood.org for more information on pruning and care for mature trees.

Judicious Editing

Keep the best plants and don't be afraid to remove or transplant those that no longer fit the current conditions, or that don't contribute to the overall landscape. If you have to prune a shrub more than every 3 to 5 years just to manage size, it's probably too large for the location.

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