

Pruning Made Easy

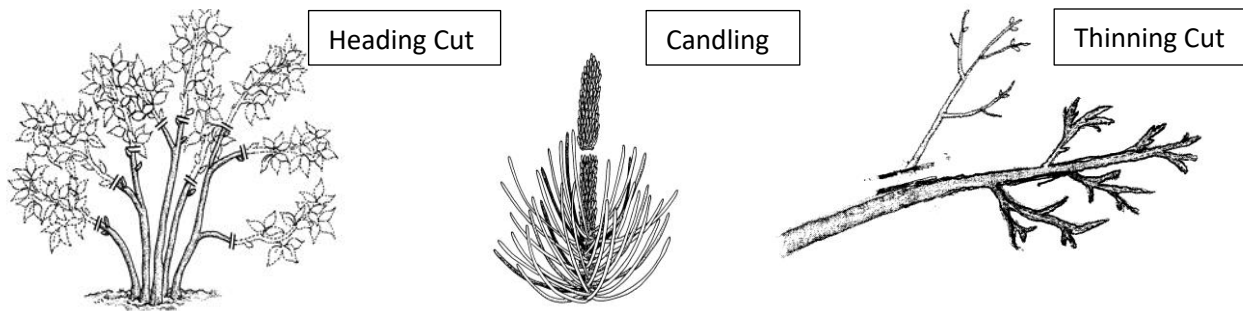
This handout focuses on trees and shrubs, setting aside annual plants, perennials, and ornamental grasses for future exploration.

Types of Pruning Cuts

Heading cuts remove the tip of a shoot or branch. This increases the number of new branches at the cut end; the shrub or tree becomes bushier when growth resumes.

Candling encourages conifers to be bushier by removing all or part of the new “candle” in spring before it begins to develop side branches. It also reduces the plant size temporarily.

Thinning cuts remove an undesired branch or twig by cutting at the point of origin, whether at ground level or from the trunk or the parent branch. Thinning cuts result in a more open plant and don’t stimulate excessive new growth.



Expectations

Pruning serves many purposes. It can guide a plant toward a strong framework or pleasing shape, encourage bushiness or open it up to invite in air and light, and direct energy toward fewer and better flowers and fruits. It does have its limits and won’t correct the common human error of planting a large tree in a small space.

Pruning Budget

Pruning removes leaves which, through photosynthesis, produce plant food. Experts recommend limiting the amount removed to no more than one-third each year. This general rule may be broken when super vigorous plants are involved, but it is best to consult a reference book, such as the American Horticultural Society book listed under “additional information.”

Tasks by Seasons

Winter

Beginners will find pruning deciduous trees and shrubs easier in the winter. Without foliage to obscure the structure of the plant, the task of choosing which portions to remove becomes clearer.

Winter pruning, however, will stimulate vigorous growth when the plant comes out of dormancy. If a bushy plant is not desirable, take care to use thinning cuts where possible to mitigate this response.

Wait to prune until the plant has become dormant. Avoid pruning in extreme cold when the plant is already under stress.

In late winter, inspect trees and shrubs for broken, damaged, or diseased limbs and remove them.

Spring

Prune summer-flowering shrubs (including roses) before new growth begins. They bloom on new branches so pruning can help encourage spectacular flowers in the same year. Consult “Pruning Trees and Shrubs”, a 10-Minute University handout, for bloom time of common shrubs.

Avoid making major cuts in trees and shrubs. When growth begins in the spring, sap flows actively and major cuts may lead to ‘bleeding’ or heavy sap excretion out of the cut. Known ‘bleeders’ include birch, cherry, plum, smoke tree, hornbeam (*Carpinus sp*), maple, silverbell (*Halesia sp*), snowbell (*Styrax sp*).

Summer

Spring flowering shrubs should be pruned after flowers fade in late spring or early summer. New branches that develop in response to pruning will provide flowers next year.

For established trees and shrubs, summer pruning is a viable alternative to winter pruning. However, this sudden ‘diet’ while the plant is actively growing will likely reduce the plant’s vigor. Summer pruning stimulates little or no growth. If you choose to prune in the summer, prune lighter than you would in the winter.

For disease management, boxwood, cherry, peach, and plum trees should be pruned only in the summer when the air is dry to discourage infection. Prune when temperature is moderate to lessen the stress on the plant.

Fall

Remove a portion or tie down long whips in shrubs such as roses and forsythia to reduce the effects of wind and snow damage during the winter.

Don’t prune trees or shrubs. Pruning stimulates growth; fall pruning can result in lots of new growth that are vulnerable to winter cold.

Additional information

OSU Publications available online at <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu>

The American Horticultural Society Pruning & Training by Christopher Brickell & David Joyce

Cass Turnbull’s Guide to Pruning by Cass Turnbull

Pruning Trees and Shrubs, 10-Minute University™ handout, www.cmastergardeners.org

Master Gardener™ Advice

- Call Home Horticulture Helpline: 503-655-8631 (Clackamas County), 503-821-1150 (Washington County), 503-445-4608 (Multnomah County).
- For other 10-Minute University™ handouts, visit www.cmastergardeners.org

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