

PRUNING TIPS EVERY BEGINNER GARDENER SHOULD KNOW



Pruning is a critical aspect of maintaining a healthy garden. For beginner gardeners, the concept of pruning can be intimidating, and many may be unsure of where to start or how to prune properly. However, with a little knowledge and practice, pruning can be a rewarding and straightforward task that enhances the health and appearance of your plants.

WHAT IS PRUNING?

Pruning is the removal of dead, diseased, or overgrown parts of a plant. Pruning stimulates new growth and promotes healthy plant development. It is a fundamental aspect of garden maintenance that helps keep plants healthy and productive.





TYPES OF PRUNING

There are four main types of pruning that beginner gardeners should be familiar with:

1. Maintenance Pruning: This type of pruning is done to remove dead, damaged or diseased plant parts. It's crucial for keep plants sound and forestall the spread of illness.

2. Rejuvenation Pruning (Hard Pruning): This type of pruning is done to revitalise old, overgrown plants. It involves the removal of large branches or stems to encourage new growth.

3. Formative Pruning: This type of pruning is done to train young plants to grow in the desired shape and form. It's done during the early stages of plant growth.

4. Crown Reduction Pruning: This type of pruning is done to reduce the size of large trees while maintaining their natural shape.

WHEN TO PRUNE?

The timing of pruning is critical to the health and growth of plants. The best time to prune varies depending on the type of plant. In general, it's best to prune during the dormant period, when the plant is not actively growing.

For deciduous trees, the best time to prune is late winter or early spring, before new growth appears. For evergreen shrubs, late spring to early summer is the best time to prune. It's also essential to consider the plant's flowering time. For example, if a plant blooms in the spring, it's best to prune it immediately after flowering.

		January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Prune after flowering (early blooming or flowers on year-old wood)	Chaenomeles (flowering quince)												
	Chimonanthus (wintersweet)												
	Deutzia (deutzia)												
	Forsythia (forsythia)												
	Fothergilla (witch alder)												
	Hydrangea macrophylla (big leaf hydrangea)												
	Hydrangea quercifolia (oak leaf hydrangea)												
	Kolkwitzia (beautybush)												
	Rhododendron (rhododendrons and azaleas)												
	Salix (pussy willows)												
	Syringa (lilacs)												
	Viburnum (viburnum)												
	Weigela (weigela)												
Prune early (before flowering)	Abelia (glossy abelia)												
	Callicarpa (beautyberry)												
	Clethra (summersweet)												
	Cotinus (smoke tree)												
	Hibiscus (hibiscus, rose of Sharon)												
	Hydrangea paniculata (PeeGee hydrangea)												
	Ilex (holly)												
Plants that rarely need pruning:	Calycanthus* (Carolina allspice)												
	Daphne (daphne)												
	Fothergilla* (witch alder)												
	Hamamelis (witch hazel)												
	Mahonia (Oregon grape)												
	Pieris (pieris, andromeda)												
	Rhododendron* (rhododendron)												

* If you decide to prune these plants, adhere to the recommended pruning schedule in the two top tables.

PRUNING CALENDAR

January to February:

- Deciduous trees and shrubs can be pruned during this period while they are still dormant.
- Prune fruit trees, such as apple, cherry, and peach trees, while they are still dormant.
- Cut back summer-flowering shrubs, such as butterfly bush and potentilla, to encourage new growth.

March to April:

- Prune rose bushes before new growth appears.
- Shape evergreen shrubs and hedges before new growth begins.
- Cut back spring-flowering shrubs, such as forsythia and lilacs, after they finish blooming.

May to June:

- Prune azaleas and rhododendrons after they finish blooming.
- Shape hedges and evergreen shrubs before new growth becomes too woody.
- Trim back any overgrown shrubs to encourage new growth.

July to August:

- Prune back any dead or diseased branches from trees and shrubs.
- Cut back any perennial flowers that have finished blooming.

September to October:

- Prune any summer-flowering shrubs that have finished blooming.
- Cut back any overgrown or damaged branches from trees.
- Prune hedges and evergreen shrubs to maintain their shape.

November to December:

- Cut back any dead or diseased branches from trees and shrubs.
- Prune any deciduous trees and shrubs while they are still dormant.
- Trim back any overgrown shrubs to encourage new growth.

It's important to note that this calendar is a general guide, and the timing of pruning can vary depending on the specific plant and climate. Always research the pruning needs of each individual plant before beginning any pruning activities and consult with a professional if necessary. With proper pruning techniques and timing, your garden will thrive and look beautiful all year round.

HOW TO PRUNE

The proper technique for pruning depends on the type of plant and the desired outcome. Beginners should start with small cuts and avoid pruning more than one-third of a plant at a time. Always cut back to the nearest bud or node, and angle the cut away from the plant to prevent water from collecting on the cut.

Before pruning, make sure you have the right tools, including pruning shears, loppers, and saws. Keep your tools clean and sharp to prevent damage to the plant.



PRUNING TOOLS

Pruning is an essential aspect of gardening that requires the use of specialised tools. There are various pruning tools available in the market, including pruning shears, loppers, saws, and hedge trimmers, each designed for specific pruning needs. In this section, we will discuss the different types of pruning tools and provide tips on how to select the right tool for the job, how to care for and sharpen tools, and how to use them safely.

Pruning Shears: Pruning shears are handheld tools that are used to cut small branches and stems. There are two types of pruning shears, bypass and anvil. Bypass shears are designed with two curved blades that overlap, making clean cuts on live wood. Anvil shears, on the other hand, have a straight blade that cuts against a flat surface, making them ideal for cutting dead wood. When selecting pruning shears, choose a comfortable size that fits your hand, and ensure that the blades are sharp and easy to open and close.



Hedge trimmers: Hedge trimmers are used to shape and trim hedges and shrubs. They have two blades that move back and forth to cut the foliage. When selecting hedge trimmers, choose one that is easy to handle and has a comfortable grip. Ensure that the blades are sharp and can cut through the foliage smoothly.



Loppers: Loppers are larger than pruning shears and are used to cut branches that are too thick for shears. They have long handles that provide leverage and make it easier to reach higher branches. When selecting loppers, choose a size that you can comfortably handle and make sure that the blades are sharp and can cut through wood smoothly.

Saws: Saws are used to cut through thicker branches and stems. There are two types of saws, hand saws, and pole saws. Hand saws are handheld and are ideal for pruning thicker branches. Pole saws, on the other hand, have a long handle and can reach high branches. When selecting a saw, choose one with a comfortable grip and ensure that the blade is sharp and durable.



When using pruning tools, safety is essential. Always wear gloves and safety glasses to protect your hands and eyes from debris. Before using any tool, inspect it to ensure that it is in good working condition. When pruning, make clean cuts to prevent damaging the bark and avoid cutting too close to the trunk or stem. After use, clean and oil your tools to prevent rust and ensure that they are ready for the next use.

PRUNING TECHNIQUES

Pruning is more than just cutting back branches; it's about shaping plants and promoting healthy growth. Different pruning techniques are used for different purposes, and it's important to know when and how to use each one.

1. **Heading back:** This technique involves cutting back the tips of branches to promote new growth and to control the size and shape of a plant. It's often used on shrubs and hedges to encourage bushier growth and to maintain a desired shape. To make a clean cut, use sharp pruning shears or loppers and cut just above a bud or side shoot.
2. **Thinning:** Thinning involves removing entire branches or stems to improve airflow, reduce density, and promote healthy growth. It's often used on trees and shrubs to remove dead, diseased, or crossing branches, and to open up the canopy to more light. When thinning, be sure to make a clean cut just above the branch collar, which is the swollen area where the branch meets the trunk.
3. **Rejuvenation pruning:** This technique involves cutting back a plant severely to promote new growth and to restore its health and vigour. It's often used on overgrown or neglected shrubs and trees that have become woody and unproductive. When rejuvenating, cut back the plant to just above the ground or to a main branch, and remove any dead or diseased wood.

To make clean cuts when pruning, it's important to use sharp tools and to avoid damaging the bark. Always cut at a slight angle and avoid leaving stubs or jagged edges, as these can slow healing and invite disease. When shaping plants, use a light touch and step back frequently to assess the overall shape and balance.

In addition to these pruning techniques, there are also specific cuts that can be used to encourage certain types of growth, such as heading cuts for bushy growth and thinning cuts for open growth. By learning these techniques and cuts, beginner gardeners can achieve the desired results and promote healthy growth in their plants.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID



Over-pruning is a common mistake that beginner gardeners make. It can lead to weak plants and an increased risk of disease. It's also essential to avoid pruning at the wrong time of year, as this can negatively affect plant growth and health.

Beginners should also avoid improper use of tools, which can damage the plant and affect its overall health. Always follow the proper technique for pruning and start with small cuts to avoid any irreversible damage to the plant.

1. Over-pruning: One of the most common mistakes beginner gardeners make is over-pruning. This can happen when gardeners cut back too much of the plant, leaving it with little to no foliage or branches. Over-pruning can weaken the plant, making it more susceptible to pests, diseases, and extreme weather conditions.

Tip: Before pruning, always ensure that you have a clear goal in mind. Determine which branches or parts of the plant need to be removed and which should be left intact. As a general rule, it's best to remove no more than 1/3 of the plant's foliage or branches at a time.

2. Pruning at the wrong time: Another common mistake is pruning at the wrong time. Different plants have different pruning needs and timing, and pruning at the wrong time can affect their growth and blooming.

Tip: Research the pruning needs of each individual plant before beginning any pruning activities. Know when the plant blooms and how it grows. For example, if a plant blooms in the spring, prune it after it has finished blooming.

3.Using dull or inappropriate tools: Using dull or inappropriate tools can result in uneven cuts, damaged bark, and even injury to the gardener.

Tip: Invest in good quality pruning tools and keep them sharp and well-maintained. Choose the right tool for the job and use it correctly. For example, use pruning shears for small branches and loppers for larger ones.

4.Cutting too close to the trunk: Another common mistake is cutting too close to the trunk or main stem of the plant. This can damage the bark and leave the plant vulnerable to pests and diseases.

Tip: When pruning, make sure to leave a small collar of wood around the cut. This will help the plant heal properly and prevent damage to the bark.

5.Ignoring safety: Pruning can be a dangerous activity, especially when working with tall trees or sharp tools. Ignoring safety can result in serious injury or even death.

Tip: Always wear gloves, eye protection, and sturdy shoes when pruning. Use a sturdy ladder or scaffold when working on tall trees or hedges. If you're not comfortable or experienced with pruning, consider hiring a professional.



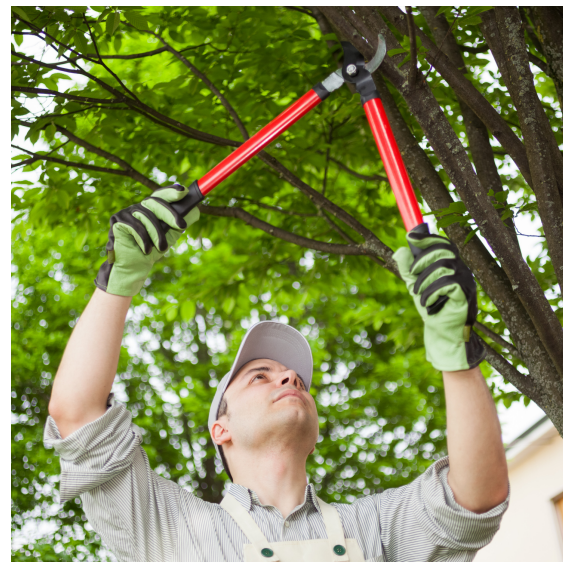
Tips for Successful Pruning

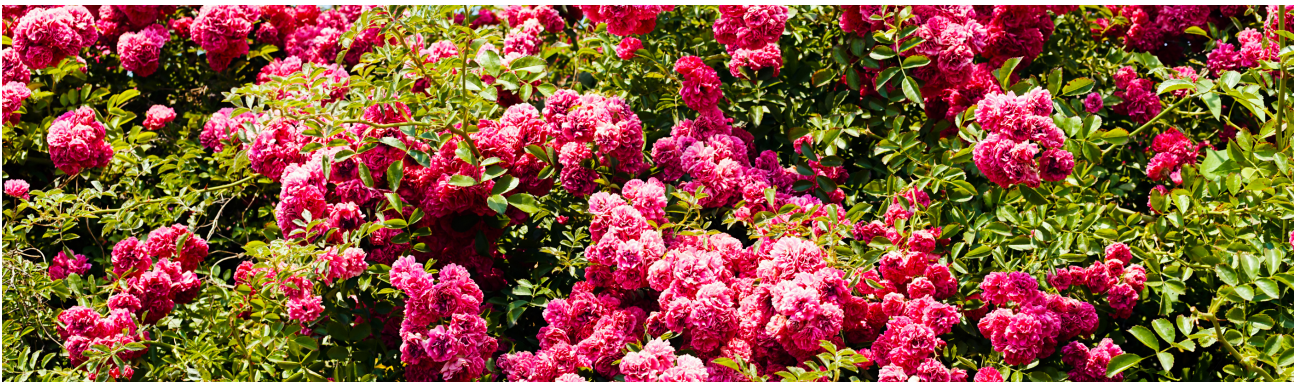
Here are some tips to help beginners achieve successful pruning:

1. Start small and work your way up to larger cuts as you become more comfortable with pruning.
2. Always clean and sharpen your pruning tools before use.
3. Consider the natural growth habit of the plant before pruning, and use a light touch when pruning.
4. Don't be afraid to ask for help or advice from experienced gardeners or professionals.

Pruning needs can vary greatly between different types of plants, and it's important to understand the specific needs of each plant before beginning any pruning activities. In this section, we will cover pruning needs for common types of plants and provide tips on how to achieve maximum fruit or flower production, control size and shape, and promote healthy growth.

Fruit Trees: Pruning fruit trees is essential to maintaining healthy trees and producing a bountiful harvest. For apple, peach, and cherry trees, it's important to prune in late winter or early spring while the tree is still dormant. Pruning during this time helps to promote new growth and increases fruit production. First, remove any branches that are diseased, dead, or broken. Then, remove any branches that are crossing over or rubbing against one another. To control the size of the tree, remove any vertical shoots or branches that are growing straight up. Keep in mind that each type of fruit tree has specific pruning needs, so be sure to research the needs of your specific tree before pruning.





Roses: Pruning roses is important for promoting healthy growth and increasing flower production. Prune roses in late winter or early spring before new growth appears. Start by removing any dead, diseased, or broken branches, and then remove any weak or spindly growth. For hybrid tea roses, prune back the main stems to about 6-8 inches from the ground, leaving only 3-5 strong canes. For shrub roses, prune back the stems by about one-third to promote new growth and increase flower production. Always use sharp pruning shears to make clean cuts and avoid damaging the bark.

Vines: Pruning vines such as grapevines and clematis is important for controlling size and promoting healthy growth. Prune grapevines in late winter or early spring before new growth appears. Remove any dead or damaged wood, and then remove any lateral shoots that are growing from the main stem. Keep the main stem intact and prune it back to 2-3 buds to promote new growth. For clematis, pruning needs can vary depending on the type of clematis. Generally, clematis should be pruned in late winter or early spring before new growth appears. For large-flowered clematis, prune back to a pair of strong buds at about 18-24 inches above ground level. For small-flowered clematis, prune back to about 6-12 inches above ground level.

Ornamental Shrubs: Pruning ornamental shrubs such as hydrangeas and butterfly bush is important for maintaining size and promoting healthy growth. For hydrangeas, pruning needs can vary depending on the type of hydrangea. For mophead and lacecap hydrangeas, prune in late winter or early spring before new growth appears. Remove any dead or damaged wood, and then prune back any old wood to the first healthy pair of buds. For panicle hydrangeas, prune back to 2-3 buds above the ground. For butterfly bush, prune back in late winter or early spring to promote new growth and increase flower production. Remove any dead or damaged wood, and then prune back to 6-12 inches above ground level.