

Methods of Pruning

1. Do-Nothing Method

“Do no (pruning) harm” is usually the best method of care for your plants. Only prune to remove dead or diseased wood. This is particularly true for plants in the ground for less than three years. Over time, most shrubs and especially trees will develop into attractive and healthy plants when left alone.

2. Two-Step Method for Shrubs

Used to control size yet maintain natural shape. Shrub pruning should not be done more than once or twice a year.

Step one: Cut back branches and stems to a half-globe shape.

Step two: Cut every other branch back (approximately 6 to 9 inches) to the first large “fork” on the branch or where the branch splits into a “V” shape. This opens the interior to sunlight and produces an informal or natural look.

3. Selective Pruning Method for Trees

Do not prune trees planted less than 3 years ago, except to remove dead, crossing or broken branches.

Carefully selected branches and stems are cut back near a supporting branch. No more than 25 percent of a tree’s canopy should be removed in any given year.

Shearing, stubbing, flush cuts, heading or topping can cause many long-term problems and are not recommended.

4. Renewal Method

This method is used for many small shrubs, perennials, ornamental grasses, and frost damaged shrubs, groundcovers, and vines. Severe cut back after the growing season or just prior to new growth in the spring. Frost damaged plants should not be cut back until after danger of any further frost. Severe pruning should be avoided during the hot summer months. **This method should only be done once every three – five years.**

5. Dead heading

During blooming, cut off dead blooms on perennials and small shrubs. When the blooming season is done, cut back stems for the next cycle of new growth and bloom. For ornamental grasses, cut each bunch flat, 6 inches from the ground in January or after the blooms have dried.

Reducing the need to prune

1. Plant the right plant in the right place. Select plants with the mature height, width and shape in mind. Don’t try to make a plant fit in an area that is too small. Give it space to grow naturally.
2. Select plants that are low-water-use and well-adapted to our low desert conditions.
3. Water properly to reduce excess growth. Most plants are opportunists and will take-up any extra watering, resulting in overgrowth. Seasonally adjust your watering frequency to reduce the need to prune.
4. Avoid fertilizing too much or too often. It creates excess growth. Many of our desert-adapted plants do not require any fertilizing at all.