

Pondering Pruning Your Plants?

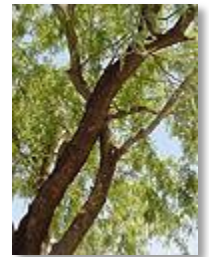
Pruning is a horticultural practice that alters the form and growth of a plant. Done improperly or for the wrong reason it can have devastating results. Here are some questions and answers to help you learn more:

How much should I prune each year?

It is important not to get stuck in a monthly or yearly pruning cycle, trimming plants just because it is “that time of year again”. You do not necessarily have to prune each plant in your landscape every year. In fact, if your landscape was designed for the mature size of the plant and you aren't overwatering, you may never to prune. By allowing the plant grow you will be able to appreciate the natural shape of the plant, increase the number of flowers and avoid any problems pruning can cause. If you do need to prune make sure not to remove more than 25% of the plant's canopy in one year. This refers to the **living** leaves, stems, branches, etc.

What should I remove first?

If you do have to prune, choose branches that are dead, diseased, or crossing first. Crossing branches should be removed to avoid rubbing bark. This may be all you need to do to improve the health and structure of the plant.



What time of year is best to prune?

There is not one answer for this question. Desert trees (mesquite, palo verde, acacia, etc.) do best to be pruned in the early May when their bark is tight against their trunk. Deciduous trees, or those that lose their leaves, do best when pruned in the winter. For flowering shrubs it is generally a good idea to wait until after the last frost date, (usually around February 15th) so any new, tender growth spurred by pruning will not be lost to frost.



What kind of pruning tools should I use?

Hand bypass pruners are good for branches that are less than one half inch in diameter. Pruning loppers are used for limbs that are less than one inch in diameter. Look for pruners that have blades that bypass one another to cut with a scissor action. These make cleaner smaller cuts. For limbs larger than one inch, a hand held pruning saw is ideal. Be sure to clean your tools with rubbing alcohol and store them in a dry location after each use.

What happens if a plant is improperly pruned?

Improper pruning can cause cracks along the trunk, heat injury, or open up the trunk to fungal or insect problems. It can lead to excessive water sprout formation or weak hazardous branches. It can reduce flowering or fruiting of your plant and can affect the overall structure and aesthetic appeal. Water sprouts occur when trees are overpruned, large branches are removed or pruning cuts are made too close to the main stem.



What about preventing storm damage?

Contrary to what you may have been told, 'thinning' trees does not necessarily prevent storm damage. In fact, it can actually cause MORE damage to your trees. This is because thinning often redistributes the weight to the ends of the branches where they can be whipped by winds causing them to fail. Often called 'lion tailing' it also removes leaves needed to produce the energysource the plant needs, starving and stressing the tree.

Should I prune my shrubs into shapes to keep them healthy?

Absolutely not! Pruning shrubs into balls, domes, or cubes will only shorten the life of the plant. By consistently removing the new growth, the plant slowly begins to thin in the center of the plant as older leaves die off. Pretty soon you are left with a bare looking shrub. You will also be removing all the flower buds when you shear prune, so you will not be able to enjoy the vibrant color shrubs can bring to your landscape. To properly prune a shrub, try [selective or natural pruning](#). You can remove the outmost branches to make the shrub the general size you are looking for. Rather than stop there, selectively prune individual branches at different heights. This will allow sunlight into the center of the plant, promoting lush healthy growth.



This shrub has been continually shear pruned into geometric shapes.



The same type of shrub pruned naturally



This lantana groundcover has been shear pruned and flowers removed.



Lantana pruned naturally.



Try selective or natural pruning instead.

Download the [Selective Pruning Guide](#)

Download [Methods of Pruning](#) descriptions.

Need help? Consider hiring a Certified Arborist. To locate one in your area visit <http://www.isa-arbor.com/findanarborist/arboristsearch.aspx>

Great information on tree care is available from [Trees Are Good](#) and the [Arizona Community Tree Council](#).

Be sure to visit the City of Chandler Water Conservation web pages for free landscape workshops, landscaping tips, rebates, frequently asked questions and more.
www.chandleraz.gov/water

City of Chandler
Water Conservation Office
conserve@chandleraz.gov
480-782-3580

