

NEWS RELEASE
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PRUNING FLOWERING SHRUBS

BACKYARD HORTICULTURE

By Gary W. Hickman, Horticulture Advisor
University of California Cooperative Extension, Mariposa County

In order to get the most out of flowering shrubs, it's important to know something about their blooming habits. If you have shrubs that need pruning, know what you wish to accomplish before you go to work. In most cases you will want to selectively prune branches without changing the plant's natural form.

First remove dead and diseased branches, and thin out severely crowded branches. This allows sunlight to reach branches and leaves in the interior of the plant. Unless the shrub is part of a formal hedge, refrain from shearing it into a box or other shape. Such pruning results in dense growth around the outside of the plant, shading out the interior branches. If you need to reduce the size of an old, overgrown shrub, it's best to do so in stages, perhaps over a two or three year period

If you are going to plant new shrubs, be sure to take into account their fully-grown size, not their size as you see them in the nursery. Be sure to consult with a nursery person or reliable reference book about mature plant sizes, especially if you are going to be planting in restricted spaces, or near sidewalks or patios.

When should you prune flowering shrubs? The blooms of spring flowering shrubs are formed on growth produced the previous year. If you prune these plants in the winter months, you will remove many of the flower buds that would produce blooms the following spring. Spring flowering shrubs should be pruned as soon as the flowers fade, usually before new growth begins. Pruned plants will have larger flowers than unpruned plants. Some examples of spring flowering shrubs and their pruning requirements are:

- Althaea (Rose of Sharon) – prune selectively after flowering; prune out old branches.
- Azalea - prune after flowering; remove faded blossoms before they seed for a better flower display the following year.
- Barberry – prune in late spring; thin and shape for hedge or topiary.
- Bridal wreath spirea - blooms on previous year's growth; when overgrown, remove oldest stems at the base.
- Camellia - prune before spring growth begins.
- Cotoneaster - thin out by removing older stems if needed.
- Firethorn (pyracantha) - prune after blooming to control shape and size; allow some berries to remain for winter display.
- Forsythia – prune after blooming in spring, remove older branches at the base of the plant; leave the younger arching branches.
- Hydrangea - blooms on old wood; prune after flowering by removing old canes; cut stems that flowered back to next laterals.
- Honeysuckle, woodbine - prune after spring flowering; remove two-year-old stems at ground level.
- Lilac - blooms on previous years growth; prune oldest branches after flowers fade; remove seed pods, dead and diseased branches, and suckers growing below graft unions at the base.
- Mock Orange - prune after bloom in spring by removing three-year-old wood to the ground; cut back flowering branches to laterals.
- Roses - prune before spring growth begins; prune shrub roses to shape the plant and thin crowded canes; cut some of the stems of rambling and climbing roses back to young shoots every year to thin the plants and promote new growth and larger flowers.
- Rhododendron – prune immediately after bloom.

- Weigela - After flowers fade, prune flowering branches to the next lateral; remove dead branches to the ground.
- Wisteria - prune after flowering, by pinching.

The blooms of summer flowering shrubs grow on wood produced the same season. These shrubs should be pruned during the dormant season, usually in early spring before growth begins. Some examples of summer flowering shrubs and their pruning requirements are:

- Abelia – prune to control size and shape; prune out crowded branches to promote new growth.
- Buddleia - (summer lilac, butterfly bush) cut back to three feet in late winter or early spring; can be cut back to the ground to renew the plant; pinch tips of new growth for more vigorous plants.
- Chinese hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*) - remove up to one third of old wood in early spring if not killed to the ground.
- Crape myrtle – prune in winter to control shape and produce flowers; heavy pruning is needed for vivid flower displays.
- Nandina - prune before spring growth begins.

For a copy of the free leaflet, “A Guide to Successful Pruning of Shrubs”, call the UCCE office in Mariposa, 966-2417.

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