

Ask an Expert – Spring Pruning Pointers

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04/07/2022

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Temperatures are warming, and it is time to get out in the yard again. One of the first orders of business is pruning shrubs, roses, fruit trees, and raspberries.

Many gardeners are intimidated by pruning because they don't know exactly what to do, so they attempt to do something they hope will look good. This often includes giving plants and shrubs a buzz cut, which is not recommended. Over time, this removes too much of the shrub's leaf-producing wood, which impacts plant health and makes it look thin.

A technique called "renewal pruning" can keep a shrub's size down and help maintain its health. It involves focusing on older branches and removing 20 - 25% of the branches from the base of the shrub. This will reduce the shrub's size by 30 - 50% and still leave enough branches to grow leaves and keep the bush's energy levels high. Shrubs that bloom in the spring such as lilac, forsythia, and snowball bush should be pruned as soon as they are done blooming.

Prune all other shrubs in late March to early April. Consider these pruning tips, and be sure to wear protective clothing and gloves to safeguard your skin.

* There are many rose varieties, and they often require slightly different pruning techniques. Prune bush/shrub roses using renewal pruning. For hybrid tea and grandiflora roses, prune them down to between knee and waist high, depending on their age and vigor. Remove all but three or four of the healthiest canes, and prune them

near the base of the rose. Hybrid tea and grandiflora roses bloom repeatedly throughout the growing season. Pruning them back keeps their size under control, increases the number of flowers, and can aid in controlling certain pests and diseases.

* When pruning fruit trees, start by pruning out dead and diseased wood, then remove crossing branches that grow up through the main canopy, and those growing downward. With the exception of peaches and nectarines, only remove 20 - 25% of the total canopy. This percentage does not include the dead or diseased wood that needs to be removed. Peaches and nectarines can have up to 40% of their wood removed since fruit is only produced on one-year old wood. [Click here](#) to see a link on pruning peach trees. [Click here](#) to see a link for pruning apples.

* When pruning raspberries, first determine if you have the summer-bearing or ever-bearing variety. Ever-bearing types produce from summer into fall, while summer types provide a heavy crop in the summer only. One way to prune ever-bearing plants is to cut all canes a few inches above the ground. This allows for a large fall crop but no summer crop. Otherwise, the correct method for both types is to remove all dead canes from the patch at ground level. They are usually darker colored and have bark that is starting to sluff or peel. Of the remaining living canes, thin them so they are spaced 6 inches apart, leaving the thicker canes. After doing this, cut the canes at chest height. [Click here](#) to see a video on pruning raspberries.

For further yard and garden tips, visit garden.usu.edu.

Contact

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