

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

How to: Prune Plants

One of the biggest parts of taking care of your plants, especially perennials, is knowing how and when to prune them. Pruning is the trimming back the plant or tree by cutting away the dead or overgrown branches or stems. Pruning is especially used to increase the plant's fruitfulness and growth. Pruning encourages new growth, and so it is an excellent practice to do annually.

When to prune:

There are three main types of plants that require different pruning tactics. Most flowering and fruiting plants do best when they are pruned while they are in their dormant stages, typically in the late winter to the early spring. Depending on the type of plant will decide how far back you prune them. For example, several kinds of grasses should be cut back to 1/3 their height. Be sure to research each plant you are pruning to be sure you prune it the correct way and don't harm the plant.

Other plants, such as spring blooming trees, should not be pruned in the late winter or early spring since they bloom in the spring. These plants typically set out new buds as soon as the old ones have fallen. To prune these plants correctly, prune them immediately after they flower so you don't risk cutting off the new buds.

And other plants yet require constant pruning throughout their growth. This can also be known as deadheading, where you pluck off the dead blooms from the plant to direct more energy to the new buds.



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One good thing to know is even if you prune at the wrong time the year, there might be short term effects such as less flowering or less growth, but it shouldn't harm the life of the plant. However, while keeping this in mind, it's also important to note that pruning too late in the season may encourage new growth that will be killed during the colder months.

How to prune:

When pruning, be sure to prune the branch or stem about 1/4 an inch above the new growth bud, and angle the cut at a 45-degree angle. There are several different ways to prune: pinching, which means to pinch the dead bud off with your fingers; heading, which means to cut back on the branch past the bud; shearing, which is to shape a bush or hedge into a spherical form; and thinning, which means to reduce the bulk of the plant. There are many different kinds of tools you can choose,



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such as hand shears – typically used for smaller branches and stems – to pole pruners and lopping shears, typically used for branches that are larger, such as more than 1 inch thick in diameter. There are also specific kinds of shears such as hedge shears that help with shaping.

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