

A PRUNING TUTORIAL

by Pat Hollingsworth

The ultimate goal of pruning is to enhance the natural beauty of ornamental plants. Pruning can redirect growth and reduce size, drawing attention to the plant's branch structure, without sacrificing shape.

A little planning and preparation can reduce maintenance, eliminate the cost of replacing plants and increase the quality of the landscape.

When making your cuts, don't leave a stub.



incorrect

correct

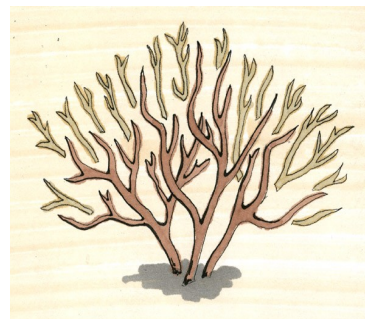
HEADING VERSUS THINNING CUTS



Heading Cuts



Thinning Cuts



A heading cut removes the tip or end of a branch or stem. Heading stimulates growth at the tips of cut branches.

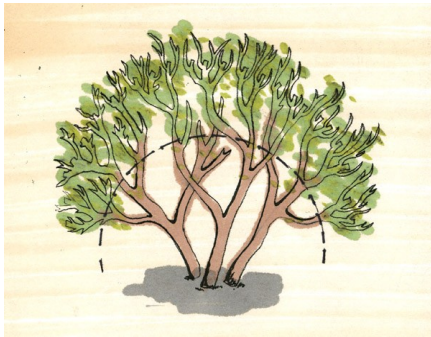
A thinning cut will remove a branch or stem where it joins another branch. Thinning allows light and air to penetrate

throughout the shrub, resulting in an even growth of foliage.

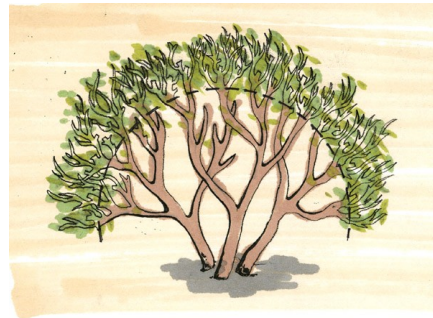
HEADING CUTS AND HOW PLANTS RESPOND

Many homeowners – and landscape professionals – use heading cuts exclusively in the desire to maintain a tidy, or sometimes formal appearance. Homeowners often expect landscapers to provide this service.

This is how the plant responds:



Since heading cuts produce tip growth, the interior of the plant will suffer for lack of light. With repeated pruning the plant will develop a "dead zone" of old woody stems that is incapable of producing new growth.



Over time and with repeated pruning, the "dead zone" expands. Blunt cut stubs are often visible in the winter landscape, adding to the shrub's disfigurement. Bare legs often develop. At this point removal may be the best option.

SHEARING

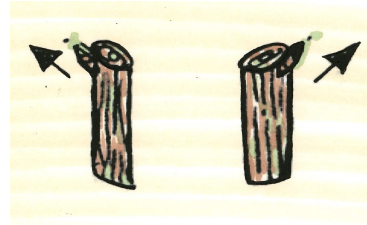
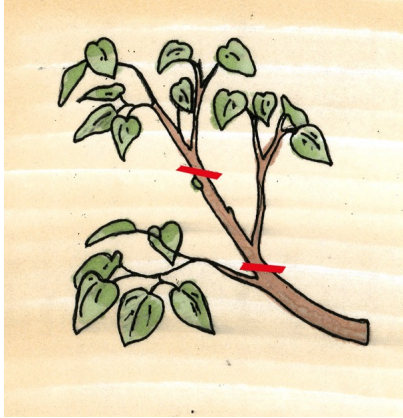
Both the **Heading Back** and **Shearing** methods of pruning tend to produce unnatural shapes. Shearing is intended to create a distinct shape, or hedge. Sheared shrubbery has a formal, clipped appearance and will require a fairly high level of maintenance to maintain the look.

Pruning stimulates plant growth making a hedge appear unkempt or shaggy. Repeated shearing is then needed to maintain a clean, crisp look.



THINNING CUTS

Thinning cuts are the opposite of heading cuts. To thin a shrub requires a lot less labor but a bit more thought. Each cut you make should be intentional and selective.



Always cut back to a vigorous bud or an intersecting branch. When cutting back to a bud, it's best to choose a bud that is pointing in the direction you want the new growth to take.

The goal of thinning is a well shaped plant kept at a desirable size. A correctly pruned plant should not show obvious signs of being cut. Correct pruning will result in a plant with a natural shape and habit. Best of all, it will last longer.

RENEWAL PRUNING

Renewal pruning is a good way to rejuvenate an older shrub, especially Red-twig Dogwood or Common Lilac. It differs from thinning in that older stems or branches are removed to ground level.



Older stems are removed to ground level. It's easier to observe the branch structure in winter

Light reaches the interior of the plant and lower branches

New growth is stimulated the following spring which results in a full and natural shape. Legginess is also minimized.

REJUVENATION

A more drastic method to rejuvenate an older shrub is to remove all stems down to 4 to 6" stubs.



1. *Shrub being rejuvenated*

2. *To further reduce size, cut back edges with a sharp spade*

This method works well on shrubs like Anthony Waterer Spirea, and is best done in March.

The renewal and rejuvenation pruning techniques are sometimes "last ditch" efforts to maintain shrubbery. Give the plant at least one year to recover. If the results are not satisfactory then the plant may no longer be appropriate for the site.

WISE PLANNING RESULTS IN LOWER MAINTENANCE



Proper pruning – and proper placement – allow us to enjoy the landscape for its natural beauty and to spend much less time attending to it. Here at RLS we prefer to use larger plants and to space them properly for mature growth. This method minimizes maintenance and provides the scale appropriate for the site.

When it comes to pruning and maintenance, communicate with your landscape professional. Our designers strive to form a partnership with our clients to address ongoing needs and to develop an appreciation for outdoor living.