



## Cooperative Extension Service

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY  
FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA 58105

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
COOPERATING



H-515



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# PRUNING SHRUBS

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## WHY PRUNE

Shrubs are pruned to limit their size, to give them desired shape, to improve their vigor and appearance, to control disease and insect damage and to remove dead branches.

## WHEN TO PRUNE

**Spring** — is the best time to prune woody plants in northern climates.

**Bare-root, non-evergreen nursery stock** — All small, bare-root non-evergreen shrubs, including hedging plants, should be pruned back severely to within 3 to 6 inches of the soil level at planting time. Prune larger bare-root shrubs (landscape grade) to approximately 50 percent of the size. This may be accomplished at planting time by heading back of large stems and by removal of damaged parts and thinning of weak shoots.

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**Potted or Container Plants** — Started plants, purchased in pots or containers, may not need pruning at planting time except for the removal of dead or weak shoots.

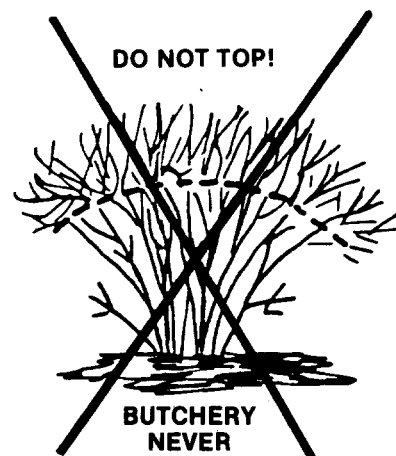
**Established Early Flowering Non-evergreen Shrubs** — Early flowering shrubs such as Van Houtte spirea, lilacs and honeysuckle are best pruned immediately after flowering. Cut very old stems to ground level and shorten the remaining large stems to young lateral branches. Avoid removing more than one-third of the total stems and branches when "after-bloom" pruning.

**Established late flowering shrubs** — such as: Hydrangea, tamarix or Froebel's spirea are best pruned by cutting all canes two years old or older at the ground line in early spring.

**Evergreen Shrubs** — include several types of junipers and the mugho pine. These may be pruned like their relatives the tree junipers and the tree pines. See Circular H-463 "Pruning Trees."

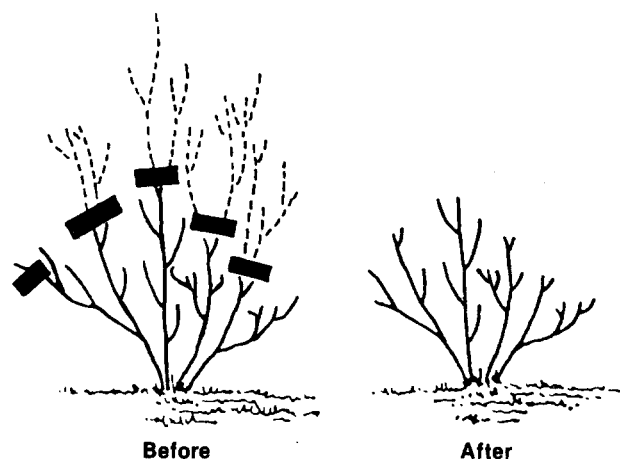
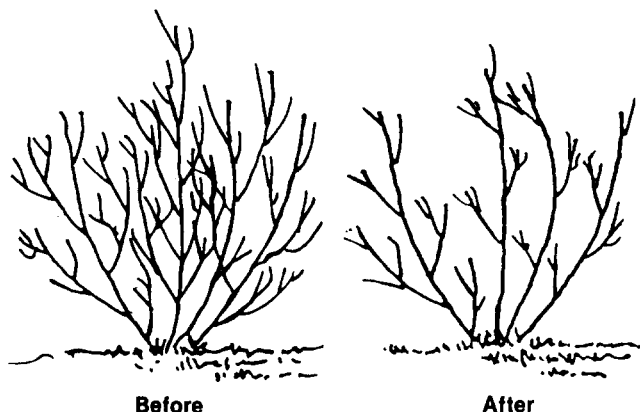
## HOW TO PRUNE

Thinning of branches and heading back of branches are the two methods of pruning that you can use to make your shrub more clearly conform to what you expect of it.

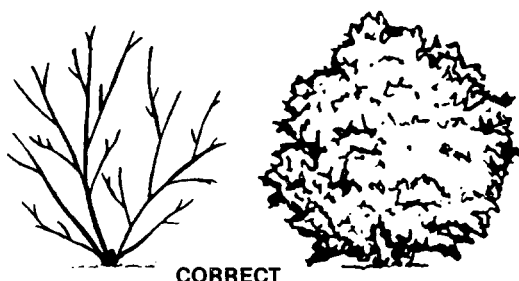


Leggy, open-bottom shrubs are best cut-back to near ground level in early spring for rejuvenation.

**Thinning** — is removing a branch by cutting it back to its point of origin on the parent stem. This is the least conspicuous method of pruning and results in a more open plant without stimulating excessive new growth.



**Heading Back** — is removing the terminal portion of a branch by cutting it back to a bud or another branch. Since new shoots develop from dormant buds, the shape of the plant may be controlled to a certain extent by cutting back to an outward or inward pointing bud, depending on the desired direction of growth. Heading back will stimulate the new growth of many new shoots and will result in a more dense plant.



Combined thinning and heading back produces a shapely shrub.



Repeated heading back produces an unnaturally leggy, top-heavy shrub.

## HEDGES

Hedge plants are pruned to give them a uniform, compact, pleasing appearance or to keep them in bounds. Since compactness is an important quality of any good hedge, it is important that heading back be started early. Such early pruning insures that you have many branches at the base of the hedge — in other words, material with which you can work to produce a hedge that is full and tight from the bottom up by the time it is mature.

An important point to remember in hedge pruning is to have the top narrower than the bottom. This allows the sun to shine on all sides of the hedge, permitting a full, dense growth from the ground to the top.

Leggy, open-bottom hedges are the best cut-back to near ground level in early spring for rejuvenation. Rapid regrowth can then be properly shaped to maintain the top narrower than the base.

