

Fine-pruning the Landscape: Part 1

I. First, a good mindset for pruning

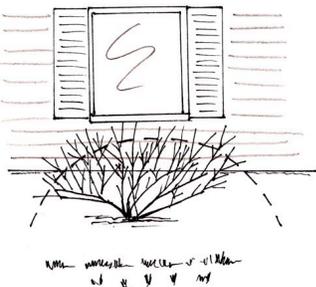
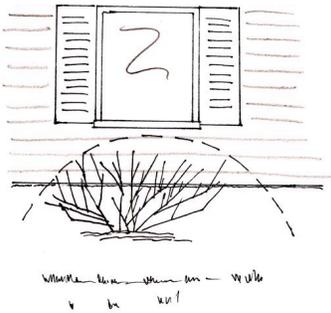
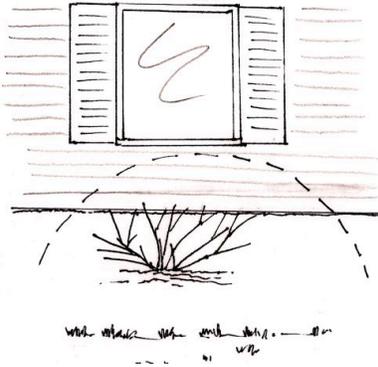
A. Much conflicting information, because:

1. There is no one right way (though every expert gardener thinks so!)
2. Techniques vary based on the desired result and available resources
3. In different locations plant may grow / respond to pruning differently
4. We ask *how* and *when* before they know the importance of *why*

B. *Why* is key to sort out contradicting or vague “how's” and “when's”

1. To restrict size
2. To improve shape
3. To promote vigorous growth
4. To remove dead, diseased or dangerous wood

C. A word about conflicting bloom info: Flowers don't come from pruning. More later!



III. Pruning to restrict size

A. The most common objective, for many reasons:

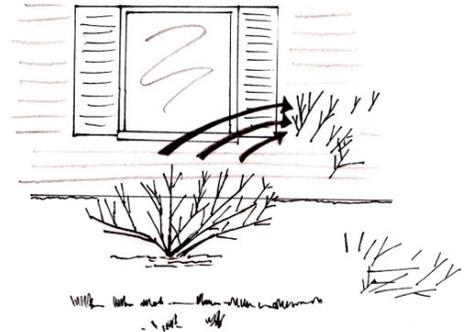
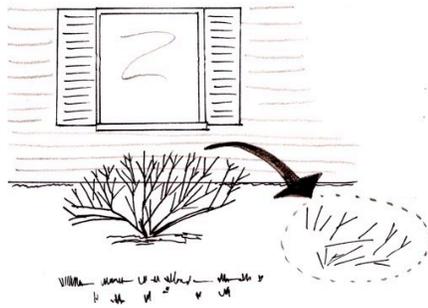
- Books vague or misleading, we misunderstand or can't visualize

B. Fortunately, *almost* any plant can be kept small.

1. Growth rate determines difficulty and amount of work to keep it small.
2. Some plants maintain their good looks better when heavily pruned, others don't.

C. Pruning to restrict size rates the simplest directions.

1. **Wait.** Let the plant grow to the desired height and width.
2. **Cut annually*** to remove all growth beyond those limits.
 - Tip: learn to distinguish current wood from old.
 - *May be able to cut every two years. See next page.
3. **Thin:** Cut 15 to 20% of branches (1 of every 5 or 6) shortening each by half again as much as first cut
 - Keeps new growth coming from the plant's interior, avoids “hollow ball” look.



D. Timing: Prune to restrict size at any time of the year.

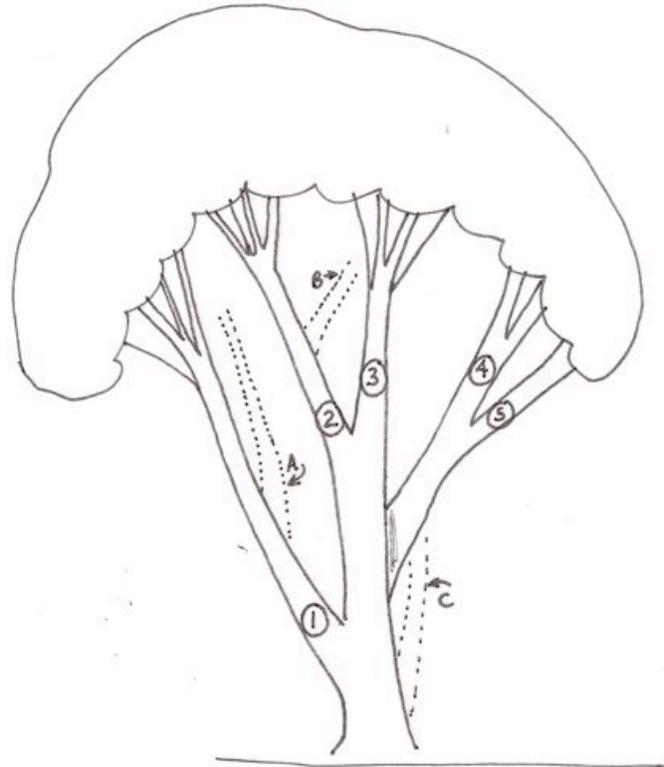
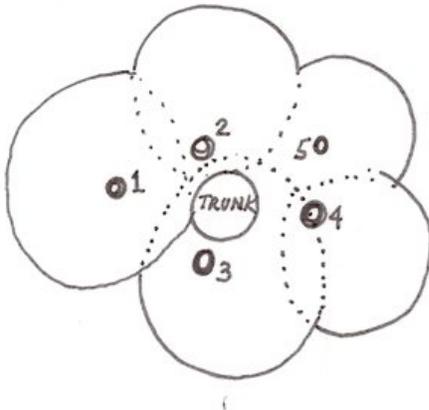
- Best done when season's growth is all set: August
- Best to avoid periods of most active growth
 - Spring as leaves expand; fall as leaves drop.
- Avoid wet weather, since diseases spread then.

E. Frequency: Be tough to cut less! Usually just one cut per year, or every two years.

- Fastest growers, tightest shapes may require two cuts.

Right and below: Applying the simple directions to keep a tree small

- 1) Select main "keeper" limbs (1-5, right)
Each keeper's branches cover distinct portion of crown (1-5, below and right)
- 2) Remove other limbs (A-C, right)



3) Prune annually or every two years when plant exceeds height/width limits you set

4) Cut one main limb at a time:

- Shorten the limb so its new tip will have 1-2 years' growth inside your line
- Cut each main limb to a side branch of 1/3 its diameter, positioned to become a graceful new tip
- Work back along the limb shortening its side branches

F. If the plant is already too big

1. Cut it back hard:

- Smaller than needed, by one year's growth (prevent hollow-ball look)
- May be easiest on the plant to do this in very early spring
- You will lose flower, but only for one or two seasons
- Keep any grafts
- For **juniper/ arbutus/ pine/ spruce** every cut must leave a leafy tip
These needled evergreens do not grow back from bare wood!

2. Wait for new growth, then begin normal restriction pruning

- Prevent undue stress while it re-grows

3. What if it dies? That might happen:

- If it's in poor health or is a can't-grow-from-bare-wood species
- You lost only the "wait for new growth" time toward replacing the plant

Fine-pruning the Landscape: Part 2

IV. Pruning to improve shape

A. "Improve" is a subjective term. It's a good thing plants are so agreeable.

B. Timing is important:

- Done after the season's growth has finished, will then require less touch-up trimming during the growing season.
- Many old and tightly clipped shrubs in Europe pruned just once per year after the year's growth is set, even once every two years

C. Easiest to enhance the natural shape, rather than impose unnatural form

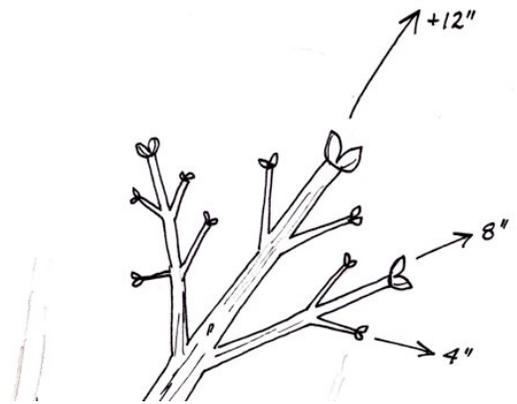
D. Use four step method to avoid being overwhelmed by long-unpruned plants:

1. Remove dead, diseased and dangerous wood.

- Narrow crotches can be "dangerous" in terms of potential breaks
- For some species, narrow crotches are normal
- In many cases, *young wood* with a narrow crotch can be spread
- Undercut large branches first, then saw off weight-y end

2. Remove suckers and water sprouts

- Suckers are sprouts from roots, or from trunk below graft
- Water sprouts: gangly straight-up wood from main branches
 - Common on fruit trees
 - Look for new / 2 year old wood with few / no leaves except at tip

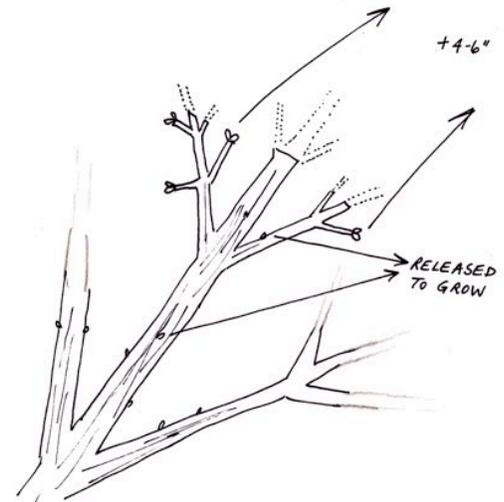


3. Remove crossing wood

- Crossing can mean rubbing but also applies to what crosses over from a rightful place to compete for another limb's part of the sky.
- Easiest to see on deciduous plants in winter

4. Prune for aesthetics

- Now that it's easy to see what you're doing
- Aim for clean lines
- Be aware of 'apical dominance'
 - At right: top bud - apex -grows most
 - Trim to above a bud "facing" in the right direction
 - Take advantage of apical dominance to produce branches to fill where you want
- Pay attention to how the plant *responds* and work with that



Fine-pruning the Landscape: Part 3

V. Don't mistake the relationship between flowering and pruning

- A. Flowering is not initiated by pruning, but might make flowers show more.
1. We prune for one or more of the "big four" reasons, not flower
 2. *IF* flowering is important in our plans for a plant:
 - We attempt to prune in a *way* and a *time* that doesn't prohibit bloom
 3. Learn to tell the difference between flower buds and leaf buds
- B. If flowers are important, modify the pruning schedule
1. Plants that normally flower before June 15 (*most* trees and shrubs):
 - Prune hardest right after flowering finishes
 2. Plants that flower after June 15:
 - Prune hardest in fall or early spring.

Fine-pruning the Landscape: Part 4

VI. Pruning to stimulate vigorous new growth

- A. Because young wood may have cleaner lines, better bark color, larger leaves
- 2 - 7 years old may bloom better than older wood
- B. Remove up to 1/3 of the trunks (shrub) or main branches (tree) annually
1. Best done in early spring but can be done any time
 2. If winter stem color important, trim only in early spring
 3. Cut down to cane's base! Often grows at tremendous rate.
 4. Cut more than 1/3? Sure. Some shrubs, cut it *all* right to the ground.*
- C. Prune the remainder of the shrub to restrict size or enhance shape
- Be aware that some few plants will not flower on branches that have had their terminal bud removed: blue/pink hydrangea
- D. Commonly cut for vigorous new wood, *'d often cut to ground annually:
- Redtwig- and yellowtwig dogwoods*
 - willows (dwarf blue-, pussy-, golden- etc.)
 - butterfly bush* (*Buddleia*)
 - smoke bush* (*Cotinus*)
 - summer blooming *Spiraea**
 - Japanese *Kerria*
 - shrub *Hydrangea*

VII. Pruning to remove dead, diseased or dangerous wood

A. Whenever necessary

B. Keep plant health in mind (best in all kinds of pruning)

1. Use clean, sharp tools.
2. Suspect disease? Sterilize tools between cuts/plants with rubbing alcohol, bleach or hydrogen peroxide
3. Avoid wet weather when fungi and bacteria spread most readily
4. Cut to remove ALL diseased wood - look at color of interior wood
5. Make clean cuts to branch base, leaving the bark "collar" (4, illus. next page)
 - Thickened, turtle-neck type ridge where branch meets branch
 - Fastest growing part of the bark, seals over wounds most quickly
 - Natural barrier to any infection entering remaining branch/trunk
 - Branch stubs create later trouble, weakness in points above
6. Or cut to just above a desirable bud
 - One that points where a new branch is desired
 - If a vertical branch, make a slanting cut above the bud
7. **Avoid tearing into bark collar:**
 - Undercut large branch first (left, below)
 - Remove weighty end (left, below)
 - Then finish cut to remove the stub but leave the collar (right, below)



C. About sealing pruning cuts with pruning paint, tar, wound dressings:

1. Research shows it ineffective or even detrimental. Plant can seal itself, better.

D. About branch strength

1. 90° branches (right angle to trunk) are strongest
2. Some species and varieties have only narrow crotches