

## Care and Pruning of Ornamental Shrubs

**T**HE value of an ornamental plant depends on its natural beauty of form and attractiveness of leaves, flowers, and fruits. When it loses these its usefulness ceases. In order to maintain these qualities, the plant must be intelligently cared for. In caring for plants, it must be remembered that they are living things, and in order to maintain an attractive appearance, they must be kept in a healthy, vigorous condition. This requires that they be given some cultural attention and occasionally be fertilized and pruned. It is the object of this leaflet to give very simple instructions for the care of flowering shrubs, roses, hedges, and conifers.

### GENERAL CARE

The greatest amount of care will be required for a period of a year or two after the plants are set. It is during this time that the new root system is being developed, and everything possible should be done to make growing conditions favorable. Weeds should be kept out of the shrub bed, and the surface of the soil should be kept loose through cultivation. A straw or leaf mulch saves labor on large areas. Usually, after three or four years the plants shade the ground enough to make weeding unnecessary.

Watering during dry spells is important. Large numbers of newly set plants are lost every year because of insufficient moisture. This is especially true in the late winter and spring months of a dry year. Plants show less injury from lack of moisture at this time and are, therefore, more likely to be neglected than during the summer. In the summer the effects are more apparent, and the owner applies the remedy more readily. The best method of watering is to make a depression around the plant and fill this depression with water. After the water has settled, dry soil should be pulled over the moist area. To water in this way twice a week is much better than to give a daily sprinkling. Some gardeners advocate spraying the foliage of newly set shrubbery during the hot dry weather. This should be done in the late afternoon.

Woody plants need fertilizing every few years even on good soil. Most shrubs respond to an application of manure made in the spring. After pruning, the owner should apply fertilizer as soon as growth has started again. There are a few shrubs that require an acid soil. To obtain this condition peat humus, leaf mold, or aluminum sulphate may be used. These should be applied to an area

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around the plant and worked lightly into the soil. The first two materials mentioned are safer to use, but sometimes the last one is more convenient to obtain. Some of the plants requiring acid soil are Azalea, Rhododendron, and Mountain Laurel.

## PRUNING

In pruning ornamental plants, one has four general purposes in view. They are: (1) to balance the top and roots at transplanting time, (2) to modify or control the form, shape, and size of the plant, (3) to regulate the number and character of the flowers or berries produced, and (4) to remove unsightly, dead, broken, diseased, or weak branches.

For the actual operation of pruning these general instructions should be followed: (1) Use sharp, clean tools; (2) use tools of sufficient strength to make clean cuts; (3) in removing branches leave no ragged portions or stubs; (4) burn all diseased or insect-infested branches as soon as they are removed; and (5) clean and disinfect the tools after working with diseased plants.

### TIME AND EXTENT OF PRUNING SHRUBS

The time of the pruning operation is determined by the age of the wood on which the flowers are produced. Those shrubs which produce flowers on the previous year's wood must be pruned soon after flowering. Those which produce blooms on the current year's wood can be pruned at any time during the dormant period. This is best done in the very early spring because any resulting bareness is soon relieved by the new growth, and portions injured by the cold can be removed along with the other pruning.

The rate of growth of shrubs suggests the amount and frequency of pruning necessary. Those shrubs which are slow of growth should have only the dead wood removed. The more rapid growing plants should have all three-year old and older wood removed, and the very rapid growing plants should have the two-year old and older wood removed and the one-year wood shortened.

For all practical purposes, all shrubs can be placed into four general groups according to the severity and frequency of pruning that is desirable. The first group includes plants which are slow of growth and which should be pruned to remove dead wood only. They are: Azalea, Camellia, Cape Jasmine, Clematis, Cherry-Laurel, Cotoneaster, Flowering Almond, Flowering Dogwood, Flowering Quince, Fringe Tree, Hawthorn, Jasmine (late flowering), Lilac, Pearl Bush, Photinia, Sweetshrub, Redbud, Viburnum, and Yellow Rose (Kerria).

The second and third groups include plants which are more rapid in growth and which are pruned to remove three-year old and older wood. The plants of the second group produce blooms on the previous year's growth and must be pruned immediately after

flowering. They are: Barberry, Bush Dogwoods, Beauty Bush (Kolkwitzia), Deutzia, Forsythia, Golden Elder, Jasmine (early blooming), Rose-acacia, Spirea (early-blooming), Tamarix, Winter Honeysuckle, Weigela, and Wisteria.

The third group includes the plants which produce blooms on the current year's wood and may be pruned at any time during the dormant season. They are: Althea, Honeysuckle (except Winter Honeysuckle), Nandina (remove leggy canes to the ground), and the Privets (Ligustrum).

The fourth group includes plants that produce blooms on the current year's growth and may be pruned at any time during the dormant season. The plants included in this group grow very rapidly, making it necessary to remove all two-year old and older wood and to shorten the one-year wood. They are: Butterfly Bush, Coralberry (Symphoricarpos), False Indigo, Hydrangea, Lilac, Chastetree, Spirea (late blooming), and Sumac.

### PRUNING FLOWERING SHRUBS

There are a number of general principles which should be studied and followed to achieve success in pruning flowering plants. Shrubs generally send out shoots each year from the base of the plants. These shoots branch and give rise to numerous smaller branches. Each succeeding year, the growth of the new shoots from a given branch becomes less vigorous, and there is less likelihood of these shoots producing blooms. In two, three, or four years, depending on the characteristics of the individual plant, it becomes necessary to remove the older branches. A rule which may be followed is: "Whenever the growth of shoots on a single branch system becomes so small that flowering is unsatisfactory or general crowding of the younger branches results, then the older branch systems should be removed to the ground". After the first pruning, it is advisable to prune each year. This annual pruning avoids the necessity of a severe pruning at a later date which often leaves the plant looking unsightly until it recovers its normal appearance.

### PRUNING ROSES

Roses vary widely in their use, form, and character of growth. Since there is so much variation in this group, there must be different methods of pruning. Roses are placed in three groups. The first includes Rugosa Rose, Austrian Briar, Swamp Rose, and Prairie Rose. These should be pruned to remove dead wood only. About every five years the whole top of the plant should be removed.

The second group includes the climbers, the ramblers, and the pillars. There is quite a bit of confusion among authorities as to the classification of the plants in this group, and since they have similar habits of growth, the same suggestions will be given for all. The pruning should be done immediately after blooming. All the

wood should be removed to the ground except where the space on the trellis is too great to be covered by one season's growth. In this case, all wood three years old or older and weak canes are removed to the ground, and the two-year wood is shortened to three or six feet depending on the size of the trellis.

The third group includes the bush roses. These are chiefly grown for use as cut-flowers, but they are also grown for the effect in beds and in special gardens. Included in this group are hybrid perpetuals, hybrid teas, teas, and chinas. These roses are pruned much more severely where a few large blooms are desired than where a quantity of small blooms is desired. For large blooms, remove all weak branches and shorten the more vigorous ones to five buds. Spring pruning is generally practiced in this climate. To assure large blooms throughout the season, the blooms should be cut with long stems, leaving three to five buds at the base of the stem below the cut to form new shoots.

#### PRUNING HEDGES

The beauty of a hedge depends upon compactness of growth, symmetry of form, and uniformity of color. Compactness of growth is the result of repeated branching of each branch system. To secure repeated branching, hedge plants should be pruned to six inches in height at the time they are set and repeatedly pruned so as to force branching for each four inches of growth upward or outward. The hedge should be pruned so that it will be a little wider at the bottom than at the top in order that the lower portion will get sufficient light to hold its leaves.

Occasionally, it is helpful to give hedge plants a severe pruning to renew the vigor. This is done by removing the branches to within six inches of the ground. After growth has started, an application of complete fertilizer should help.

#### PRUNING CONIFERS

In general, conifers do not need pruning, but there are some cases where it is desirable. Greater care must be exercised in pruning conifers than in some of the more vigorous plants of other groups. Pruning should be done in the early spring just before growth starts. Some plants may be simply sheared to increase density of growth and to enhance the appearance. Some of the plants are: Italian Cypress, Red Cedar, Chinese Juniper, Yew, and Oriental Arborvitae. Other conifers which are more irregular in outline may be reduced in size or directed in form by cutting back carefully selected branches to a growing point. In doing this, the pruner should keep in mind the natural appearance of the plant and be governed accordingly.