Why Prune?

“To make sure that plants are as healthy and vigorous as possible, free of structural weakness, and at the least risk of being infected by disease.”

“Improve natural appearance and enhance ornamental features such as flowers and foliage.”

“Ensure a healthy, soundly structured, and pleasingly shaped plant.”

American Horticulture Society
Pruning and Training
Types of Pruning

1 – Ornamental

2 – Artistic

3 – Fruit Production
South Whidbey Tilth Fruit Tree Pruning Workshop
January 22, 2005

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Fruit trees

• **Apple Trees**
  Best time to prune – winter when dormant
  Remove dead, diseased and damaged limbs
  Head back branches – don’t remove fruit spurs unless old or diseased
  Thin for air movement

• **Pear Trees**
  Same as apple trees

• **Peach Trees**
  Best time to prune is in the winter when trees are dormant.

  Shape should be that of a funnel. With the branches forming the sloping
  sides and the center top is left open. The open center permits better
  ripening of the fruit.

  Fruit is borne on one year old wood and not on spurs, so the fruited wood
  must be renewed each year. The fruit appears on the twigs and branches
  that grew last summer. Although they flower along the entire length of a
  branch, the only flowers you should let set fruit are those in the center one
  third section.

  After you have thinned the tree you should cut back these twigs about a
  third of their length.

  Select those branches with the most amount of lateral twigs.

  When the shaping has been completed, you should have fifty to sixty
  percent of the tree on the ground.

• **Plum Trees**
  Best time to prune is mid-summer, mid June through July.

  Plum trees produce fruit on wood that grew the previous season and on
  spurs of older wood.

  Lightly prune, making only thinning cuts.

• **Apricots**
  Best to be pruned in the winter.

  Prune out enough branches to evenly shape the top, selecting only old
  wood whenever possible and thin out to allow sunlight penetration to all
parts of the fruit producing top. The long whip branches that grew during the summer are the fruit producing wood for the coming year.

Fruiting spurs are borne on one year old branches. They appear toward the end or in the middle of the one year old branches and they are the fattest or/and fullest buds in the bud cluster. All of the long, narrow buds are vegetative buds. The fruit spurs will continue to produce fruit.

Remove the drooping outside branches. They have a tendency to gradually lower each year from the weight of the fruit and foliage.

- **Figs**
  
  Best time to prune is in the winter.

  Figs fruit on last year’s growth. Prune hard, but leave enough of last year’s wood to get a good crop.

- **Cherry**
  
  Best time to prune is in the summer. Remove dead, diseased and damaged wood. Let them be after that.

**Contacts:**

- Peaceful Valley Farm Supply – [www.groworganic.com](http://www.groworganic.com)
- Look up Brix Mix – order their free catalog – it’s great
- Raintree Nursery – [www.raintreenursery.com](http://www.raintreenursery.com) – great fruit trees for the NW

**Organic Pesticide Sprays**

- Horticultural oil – dormant oil to be sprayed in late winter/early spring
- Lime Sulfur – for control of apple and pear scab
- On all pesticides (organic or not) – read the label and follow directions
- Tree wrap-guard – local nursery. For control of rodents eating bark of young trees.
- Deer/rabbit fencing – Benner’s Gardens – [www.bennersgardens.com](http://www.bennersgardens.com)
IMPORTANT TERMS

Tree Collar

Heading Cut

Thinning Cut

Drop Crotching

Sucker

Watersprout

Fruit Spur
Pruning for Art

Pruning art forms break the general rules of pruning to achieve certain special effects. Successful pruning art always meets three criteria:

- The species chosen lends itself by virtue of its natural shape and degree of toughness

- Manipulation of the plant is intensive. Pruning begins when the shrub or tree is young, and selective pruning is guaranteed annually for the life of the plant.

- The art form reflects a specific formal style and therefore matches the overall intent of the garden.

**Topiary:** Sculpting plants. Tightly sheared geometric shapes. Often in estate gardens and formal rose or flower gardens. Boxwoods, English Yew, and Japanese Holly.

**Espalier:** Plants are trained in two dimensions, usually flat against a wall. Originally applied to fruit trees for ease of production. Apples, pears, quince, pyracantha, cotoneaster and camellias.

**Pollarding:** Major limbs of young trees are headed and subsequent new shoot growth is annually cut off to swellings called pollard heads. The result is a large leaved ‘lollypop’ tree, often used as an accent in formal garden. The stark, gnarled winter silhouette adds interest in an appropriate setting. The term pollarding is often misapplied to common tree topping. Mulberry, London Plane.
Cloud Pruning: One of several highly stylized Japanese pruning art forms. Cloud pruning is often mistakenly referred to as bonsai (bonsai means ‘in a pot’). Pines are thinned out dramatically, and the buds (called candles) are pinched each spring to cause a ‘puff of clouds’ look to the ends.

Pleaching: Branches of trees are woven when young to create living gazebos and arbors. Willow, Hornbeam and Apple.

Coppicing: Cane-growing plants are cut to the ground annually to accentuate their bright stem color. Red and Yellow Twig Dogwood and White Stemmed Brambles.
Pruning by Habit

Prune to enhance the plants’ natural shape or “habit”. Plants have one of three basic habit.

1 – CANE GROWERS

Plants that renew themselves by sending up new branches called canes from the base.

Examples: Forsythias, roses, bamboo, Oregon Grape, Red Twig Dogwood

Very tough plants – you can hardly hurt them

A) Take out all dead wood. Always do this first.

B) Take out some (1/3 to 1/8) of the biggest and oldest, as well as a few of the puniest canes, to the base. Do this every year to keep the size controlled.

C) Pick out a few of the worst canes that rub or cross each other, that look sick or go the wrong way (that is, start at the outside, head back through the center and out the other side), and ugly branches (usually too straight).

D) Tidy up the top with thinning cuts. Cut back anything hanging on the ground and cut to a side branch or bud.

Prune With Vigor!
Pruning by Habit

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2 – MOUNDS

Look like mounds and are medium-though plants, found in mass plantings. They have small leaves and supple branches. You usually just want to tidy them up or reduce their size. People like to shear them – don’t.

Examples: Abelia, Escallonia, Barberries, Mexican Orange, Rock Rose Burning Bush, Spireas, Hollys

A) Locate the longest, most unruly branch. Grab the tip, follow the branch down into the interior with your pruners, and snip it off two inches to one foot below the general surface level of your shrub. Cut to a side branch or bud if possible. This is call the “Grab and Snip” method.

B) Don’t look for the next closest branch that’s too long, but the next worst too long, too unruly branch in the area and cut it back. Do this all over the shrub until it looks miraculously tidy and shorter, but natural.

C) These shrubs often benefit from taking out some of the old canes to their base. This opens up and renews the shrub. Any dead wood should also be removed.
Best to let these get big and they are not to be pruned heavy-handed. Good selective pruning can open them up and make them look less oppressive, trained away from gutters and off houses and out of walkways. These shrubs are the hardest to do. Never remove more than 1/8th total leaf surface in one year as it will stress them out and can cause a watersprout-rebound effect.

Examples are: Rhododendrons, Pieris, Magnolias, deciduous Viburnums, Camellias, Witch Hazel, Kalmia, Elderberry, Enkianthus, Huckleberries, deciduous Azaleas, Lilac.

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A) Remove all of the dead, diseased and damaged wood.

B) Takeout suckers

C) Take out any big crossing, rubbing branches and double leaders.

D) Take back or remove any branches hanging on the ground, if only up 1/2 inch.

E) Take out the worst of the smaller crossing, rubbing branches – choosing the healthiest and best placed branch to remain.

F) Prune to shorten or completely remove the worst wrong way branches that start from the outside of the shrub, and go the wrong way back into the center and out the other side.

G) If you have two parallel branches rather close together, it may look better to remove one. If you have three parallel branches you may want to remove the center one.

Before you finish, stand back and observe.