



## Pruning Basics

Books have been written about pruning in the garden, and certainly in the case of fruit trees and specialized methods (such as bonsai and espaliered plants) careful study is necessary and rewarding. But the vast majority of pruning that will be necessary in the garden can be generalized into a logical order, with only a few exceptions.

**Pruning Trees** - Other than fruiting trees (study up for them), trees need fairly infrequent pruning. Dead or broken branches can be removed in all seasons, and should be cut back to the collar tissue, which is the swelling of bark where it meets the main trunk. This collar contains the cells which will heal the wound quickly, and should not be removed. Nor should the branch you are cutting extend much beyond this collar, in order to minimize potential infection. Don't bother with spraying or painting the cut branch; studies show this can actually impede healing.

Pruning for size should be done at the proper season. Most flowering trees are pruned immediately after flowering, which will allow the tree form new buds for the following year. Many are also pruned in mid-winter, while dormant, if they need rejuvenation or a size reduction. Evergreen trees prefer late spring or mid-summer pruning, with the exception of pine trees, which prefer spring before their new growth starts. Avoid pruning evergreens in the fall or early spring.

**Pruning Shrubs** - If it blooms early - prune right after blooming. If it blooms late - prune in spring or while dormant in winter. If it blooms most of the growing season, as some now do, prune whenever, as it is making buds on new wood. If it is evergreen, prune in early to mid-summer, unless it's a boxwood, which prefers to be pruned at Christmas time so you can use the cuttings to decorate.

Roses can be cut back quite strongly in very early spring, when the new growth is just beginning to swell. Cut back individual flowering stems to a five-leaflet, outward facing bud to encourage new flowers. Be diligent about removing dead or damaged stems, remembering those thorns!

**Pruning vines** - Most vines are cut back after flowering or in winter, but Clematis respond best to early spring pruning. The new buds swell anytime from late February to late March here, and that's the optimum time to get out and cut back each stem to either a bud or to the ground. The new growth will be vigorous and the flowering profuse!