Minter Country Garden

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Pruning 102

With Brian Minter

The Basics

Bud: A small protuberance of new growth on a stem

Bud Union: The point at which the stems join with the main rootstock

Conifer: A seed or cone bearing tree with scale-like or needle-shaped leaves, often evergreen

Deciduous: Trees, shrubs or plants that that lose their leaves/foliage at the end of the growing season

Dormant Season: For our area, this is November to February.

Espalier: To train branches or vines to grow flat against a wall or trellis, often in the shape of a fan

Evergreen: Trees, shrubs or plants that keep their leaves/foliage year round

Loppers: Long-handled, heavy duty pruners used to cut thick branches and stems

Pruners: Hand-held shears used for cutting thin branches and stems

Shearing: Lightly pruning only green growth, not woody branches, generally with shears.

Suckers: New upright stems that emerge from the roots, or major branches, of woody plants.

Broadleaf Evergreens

Flowering specimens: Prune just after flowering. Includes: Pieris, Azaleas, Rhododendrons, Camellias. The harder you prune, the longer it takes to bloom again.

Non-Flowering specimens: Prune when new growth begins. Includes: Photinia, Boxwood, Laurels.

Berried plants: Prune in spring when you can see where the flowers are forming. Most need only be pruned to maintain shape. Includes: Cotoneaster, Pyracantha, Holly.

Nandina: (Heavenly Bamboo) Prune only when too tall for its location. Prune stems to 12-18" from the ground.

Summer Heather: Give a light shearing in in late winter before growth begins.

Winter Heather: Prune lightly each year immediately after blooming, just below old, spent flowers.

Evergreen Conifers

Specimens that can be pruned in both dormant and growing period: Juniper, Cedar, Cypress.

Specimens to be pruned when the buds or candles begin to grow: Spruce, Fir, Pine.

Ornamental Flowering Shrubs

Generally, prune flowering shrubs as soon as they finish blooming.

Specimens that set buds during late spring through fall: Prune immediately after flowering. Includes: mophead Hydrangeas, Forsythias, Lilacs, Deciduous Azaleas.

Specimens that set bud on new growth: Prune back in the dormant season. Includes: Butterfly Bushes, Pee Gee Hydrangeas, Potentillas, Weigelas.

Ornamental Trees

Deciduous Specimens: Generally, prune deciduous trees and shrubs during the dormant season.

Specimens to prune in mid summer: Japanese Maples, Birch, Walnuts.

Specimens to prune continually during the growing season: Willows, shrub Dogwoods.

Flowering Specimens: Generally, prune flowering trees and shrubs as soon as they finish blooming. Includes: Kousa Dogwoods, Magnolias.

Roses

Modern Roses, Hybrid Tea, Floribunda and Grandiflora Roses: Prune lightly in late fall to clean up old blooms and any dead or weak wood. Prune hard to 6-12", when the Forsythia (the early yellow blooming shrub) blooms in early spring. Try to prune to develop a 'vase' shape - this improves air circulation which helps reduce fungus development.

Shrub and Antique Roses: Require mostly thinning and training rather than hard pruning each year. Remove dead or weak wood after blooming. Prune when the Forsythia blooms (early spring) to maintain shape and size and to remove unproductive canes.

Climbing Roses: For the first 1-2 years, during the growing season, train canes to desired shape, pruning out dead or weak wood and finished blooms. Once established, when the Forsythia blooms (early spring), prune out old, unproductive wood, and cut back each productive lateral stem to 2-3 buds. Best blooms develop on 2-3 year old lateral wood.

Ramblers: Prune in late fall. Cut out all canes that show no signs of new, vigorous growth. As canes mature, train them into position. Train annually for best appearance.

Vines

A.B.C.'s of Clematis
Group A - Old wood (early) blooming. Prune to remove dead or weak wood as soon as blooming finishes (late spring). Later or severe pruning will greatly reduce the number of blooms the following season. Varieties include: montana and macropetalas.

Group B - Both early and late blooming. In late February or March, lightly prune stems to varying lengths. Remove dead or weak wood and carefully space the remaining stems. Severe pruning will reduce the number of blooms the following season, but generally gives plants a 'boost'. Varieties include: 'General Sikorski' and 'Nelly Moser'.

Group C - New wood (late) blooming. In late Feb. or March, prune plants back to two sets of buds on each stem, as close to ground level as possible. Blooming commences from the bottom of the plant and goes up. If left unpruned, blooming typically begins close to the end of the previous year's growth. Varieties include: viticella Rubra, Jackmanii, and 'Gypsy Queen'.

Evergreen Clematis- Follow pruning guidelines of Group A. Varieties include: armandii.

Evergreen Vines: Prune lightly during the growing season and severely only during the dormant season.

Fast Growing Non-Flowering: Prune at any time to control shape and extent. Prune more heavily in early spring. Specimens include: Ivy, Virginia Creeper.

Flowering Vines
New wood blooming: Prune hard to control size and shape in dormant season. Prune to thin or remove dead or weak stems throughout the growing season. Specimens include: Trumpet Vine, Honeysuckle.

Old wood blooming: Prune in early spring to control and to remove dead or weak wood. Prune lightly to shape during growing season. Specimens include: Wisteria, Climbing Hydrangea. Leave old hard wood.

Groundcovers

Generally, shear modest plantings to control size and shape. For large masses of woody groundcovers or those whose centers have become 'bald', prune back heavily at the end of the dormant season or early spring, before new growth begins.
Flowering Groundcovers: Shear immediately after blooming.

Ornamental Grasses

Evergreen: In early spring, prune back by about 1/3. In early summer, if starting to go to seed, give a light trim. Specimens include: Fescues, Carex.

Herbaceous: In late winter, before new growth begins, prune back to 2-4", depending on clump size, from the ground. Specimens include: Miscanthus, Pennisetums. If snow or rain knock them over, prune at that time to clean them up.

Perennials

Evergreen: Prune in late winter before new growth appears. For flowering perennials, prune immediately after blooming. Specimens include: Lavender. For evergreen euphorbia, prune back by no more than 1/3 after flowering.

Herbaceous: When foliage has gone brown and finished, prune back to 2-3" from the ground. Specimens include: Astilbe, Rudbeckia, upright Phlox.

Small Fruits

Generally, in late fall or during the dormant season, prune out and weak or dead stems and trim the plant to shape. For established plants, this is the time to selectively prune some of the oldest branches to the ground. This will help rejuvenate your plant and promote larger fruit growth. Specimens include: Currants, Gooseberries.

Blueberries: Need to be well established before pruning and even then, only light pruning to thin out and open up the plant to more air and sunlight. Big stems need to be cut back to allow better branching.

Grapes

Generally, grapes are produced on one year old wood. Pruning should therefore be focused on developing vines in two stages: year old wood for current year's grape growth, and new vines that will act as one year old wood next season.

At planting, just let the plant get growing. Make sure you have good soil plant with bone meal and apply root booster. The goal is to get a strong roost system growing. During the **first summer**, cut back the side shoots only. During the **second summer**, select two strong branches on either side of the main stem and train them outwards along the wire/support. In the **third summer,** allow stems to grow side shoots, and then in winter, prune these side shoots back to two buds on each. Keep these side shoots pruned back to two buds every winter to achieve optimum productivity.

Cane Berries

During the growing season, remove any dying canes. In winter, save 4-5 canes of last summer's growth and cut out everything else. If you leave the canes a little longer and bend them over on wires, you will increase production by about 30%! For everbearing varieties, cut canes to the ground in late fall.

Vine Berries

At the end of the growing season (once all the leaves are off), select the best of **new** canes from that growing season and cut them back to 5-6', and prune side branches back to 8-10". These will become the most productive vines next season. Cut all other canes to the ground.

Essentially, vine berries operate on a process of continual renewal, with berries producing best on 2 year old wood. After that second year though, the cane has done its job and it should be cut to the ground to allow new canes to mature and produce the following season. Specimens include: Tay, Logan and Boysenberries, Thorn-less Blackberries.