

January 2023 Gardener's Corner

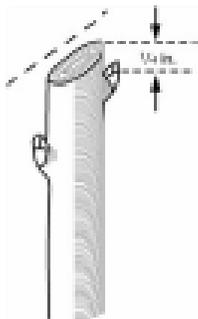
By Cate White, Master Gardener

Winter Pruning

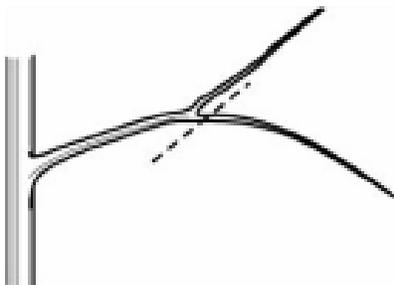
Happy New Year! Now is the time of year when many of us (myself included) want to curl up with a good book, a warm beverage, snuggle under a warm blanket and wait until the weather warms up and the days lengthen. And generally, there are few garden chores at this time of year, with one exception: pruning.

Winter is an ideal time to prune woody plants since they are mostly dormant. While not all plants require pruning, there are many reasons to prune, including training young plants, grooming for appearance, controlling for shape and size, re-invigorating growth, and removing dead and diseased wood. Generally, it's best to prune plants that have lost their leaves, such as maples, and those that have finished blooming for the season, such as roses. Some that bloom early in the year, such as viburnams, should be pruned just after blooming. To avoid disfiguring damage, it is important to use proper technique, and prune judiciously. The following basic guidelines are for woody trees and shrubs generally. Fruit trees and roses require more specialized techniques. For large mature trees, hiring a certified arborist is recommended.

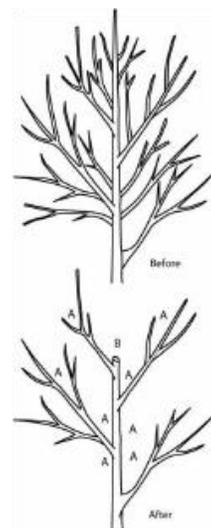
There are two primary types of pruning cuts: heading and thinning. Heading consists of cutting back to a stub, lateral bud, or small upright. Severe heading, including topping of trees, is not recommended since it leads to a flush of vigorous, dense, and often weak new growth. When heading back, cut small stems to about $\frac{1}{4}$ " away from a lateral bud, cutting at a slant. (See figures 1 and 2.) New growth will generally follow the direction the bud or branch is pointing. Thinning is defined as removing a lateral branch at its origin or shortening the branch's length by cutting to a lateral large enough to take the terminal role. (See figure 3.) Woody plants respond to thinning by becoming more open but retaining their natural growth and shape. Pruning shears are best used for small limbs, although saws are necessary for larger ones. Keep your shears clean and sharp.



**Fig. 1 UCANR flyer -
Heading Cut**

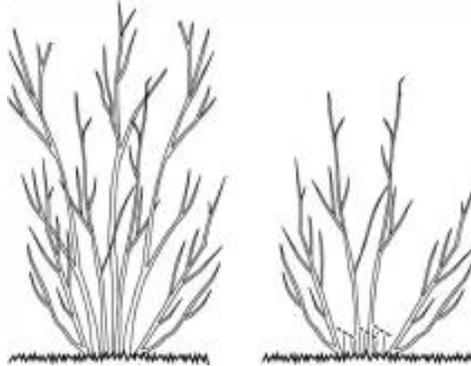


**Fig. 2 UCANR flyer -
Heading Cut**



**Fig. 3 UCANR flyer
- Thinning Cuts**

When pruning broadleaf shrubs, your goal should be to keep their natural shapes. Shearing or heading cuts should mostly be avoided, while thinning of older, taller growth is the best practice. Cut off the oldest and largest branches at or near the ground, leaving shorter, younger stems. Newer shoots can be thinned or headed as needed to shape the plant. (See figure 4.) For older, overgrown shrubs, it is best to cut out all old growth over a period of several years to preserve the plant's natural shape and flowering habits.



**Fig. 4 UCANR flyer –
Broadleaf Shrubs - Thinning Cuts**

Coating pruning cuts with materials such as asphalt emulsion is not recommended, since the coating can trap moisture, increasing chances of decay and inhibiting wound closure. The best practice is to simply leave cuts exposed to dry in the air.

A word about tree staking. Young trees can be staked to keep them growing straight and to prevent trunks breaking in strong winds. As they grow and trunks become stronger, staking can be less restrictive, since allowing the trunks some movement helps to strengthen them. Eventually all staking can be removed. Check regularly to be sure that staking is appropriate, and ties are not so tight that they are cutting into the trunk, which will weaken it.

January Garden Checklist

- Plant bare-root shrubs, trees and roses.
- Peas, parsley, lettuce, mustard and radishes can be planted from seed as early as January. Most of these, excluding radishes which grow quickly from seed, can also be planted as young plant starts. You can also plant asparagus rhizomes and white potato slips.
- Apply a second dose of fungicide to peaches and nectarines to control leaf curl. (The first dose should be around Christmas or New Year's day, the second dose in mid-January, and the third dose around Valentine's day, or before buds start to open.)
- Prune deciduous trees and shrubs (such as apple, pear, crepe myrtle, roses and stone fruits), encouraging good form and structure. Remove dead, diseased and borer infested wood, then spray with horticultural oil (found in most nurseries) to discourage over-wintering pests and diseases.
- Continue monitoring and baiting for snails, slugs and ants. Snail bait that is iron-based is safer around pets.
- Adjust watering schedules according to weather. Remember not to water within 48 hours of measurable rain. If you have plants growing under eaves and in entryways where they do not get rain, water occasionally by hand.
- Protect sensitive plants from frost with covers or by bringing under shelter.