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R.D. Uhlinger

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

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Pruning Ornamental Plants

R. D. Uhlinger
UNL Horticulture Professor

March through May is the best time for pruning lawn trees, junipers, and flowering shrubs. Leaves are gone from the deciduous plants so we can see the branching structure and determine where cuts should be made. Healing occurs most rapidly when growth is starting in the spring, so wounds caused by pruning are quickly healed.

Annual, light pruning is better than occasional, heavy pruning - it is easier on the plant and easier on the pruner. It is also easier on the pocketbook if we hire the work done. Size, shape and health of plants can be maintained by annual, light pruning if we start when plants are small and follow our pruning program faithfully.

If trees or specimen shrubs have grown too large or too full and heavy pruning is necessary, do the work in two or three annual steps. Again, it's easier on the plant, pruner and/or the pocketbook.

Early flowering shrubs (spiraea, lilac, forsythia, mock orange, shrub roses, ninebark, juneberry, flowering plums, flowering quince, and flowering cherries) are best pruned immediately *after* they flower. Flower buds of these plants develop late in the summer and open the following year. Spring pruning would remove many of the flower buds before they have a chance to bloom.

Basic Requirements For Pruning

1. Use COMMON SENSE and be SAFETY CONSCIOUS.
2. Use ADEQUATE, SHARP TOOLS - they are easier on plants and pruners.
3. LOOK AHEAD and BE DECISIVE - Cut out the branches you think need to be removed.

The COMMON SENSE - SAFETY requirement is most important. Pruning tools are dangerous. Sharp sticks and stumps are dangerous. Dropping limbs are dangerous. The pruner *must be alert* for his own safety and that of others. Plants can produce a new limb but people cannot.

USE TOOLS THAT FIT THE JOB: Hand pruners for branches up to 3/4 inch in diameter, lopping shears for those up to 1 1/2 inches, and saws for anything larger. SHARP TOOLS ARE A MUST. Use a small file and/or whet stone to touch up cutting blades after every 5 to 10 cuts. Clean, smooth cuts can then be made easily and they will heal quickly.

Make cuts close to the trunk or branch which is being left, but avoid a scalloping cut. Stripping of bark and splitting can be avoided by:

1. Undercutting any branch that is large enough to require sawing.
2. Placing the cutting edges of pruners against the UNDER side of smaller branches to be cut.

LOOK AHEAD BUT BE DECISIVE: First, remove all dead, broken, diseased or crisscrossing branches. Starting from that point, consider the size, form, and density that you desire. Remove stems and branches that do not contribute to that mental image. Try to anticipate the change that will occur when a particular cut is made then make the cut. Remember that a plant can soon cover up most pruning errors.

Pruning Systems

It is difficult to improve on the natural shape of a plant so we recommend size reduction through two pruning systems that retain the original form of the tree or shrubs.

1. FOR SPECIMEN SHRUBS AND FOR "NATURAL FORM" HEDGES: Annually remove about 1/3 of the oldest, tallest stems plus weak sucker shoots and 1/3 of the strong new shoots. Leave strong new shoots that are within the size and shape limits desired. This approach will insure an adequate supply of young, healthy flowering stems and yet keep the size of the plant within bounds. System 1 plants include red or yellow twig dogwood, lilacs, russian almond, flowering almond, wild currants, mock orange, forsythia, deutzia, viburnums,

shrub cotoneasters, spiraea, privet, buckthorn, shrub euonymus, elderberries, snowberry, coral berry.

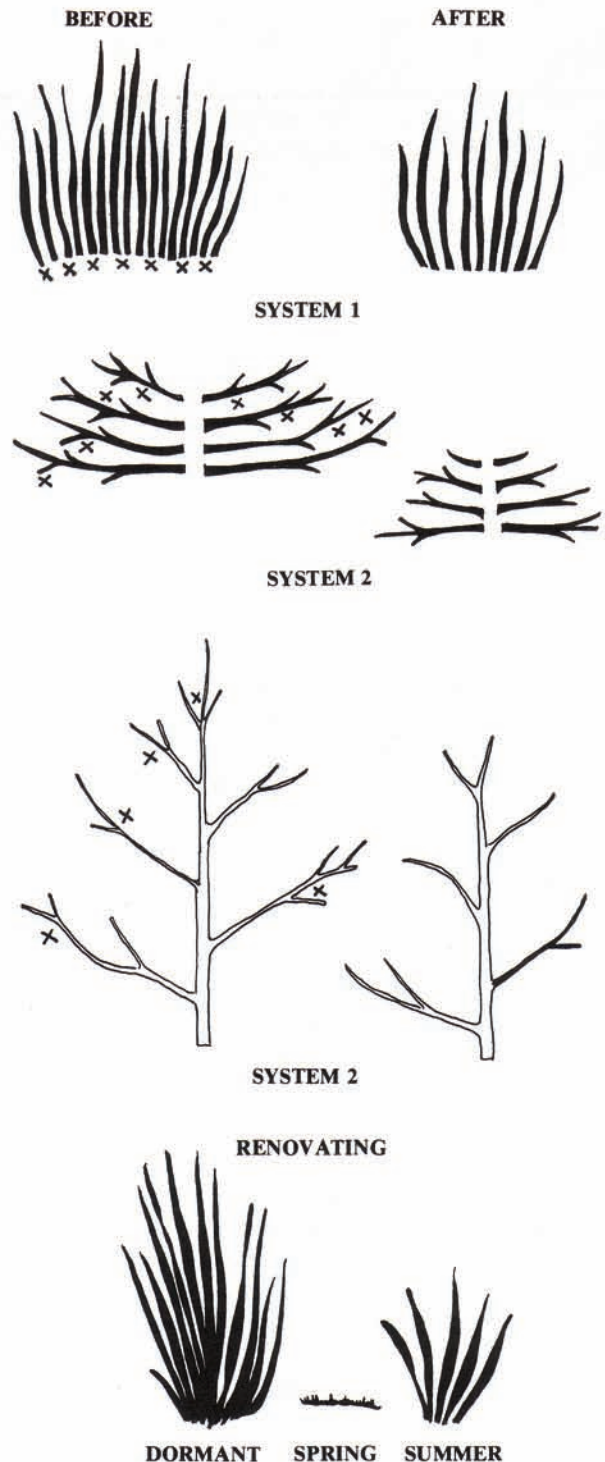
2. FOR EVERGREEN SHRUBS, SMALL TREES, AND SHADE TREES: Prune over-size branches back to a smaller branch growing in the same general direction as the part removed. This procedure, called "drop crotching," effectively reduces height and spread without changing the form of the plant. System 2 plants include:

- (a) Spreaders - pfitzers, tammy junipers, horizontal junipers, yews
- (b) Upright - yews, boxwood, rocky mountain juniper, eastern red cedar.
- (c) Deciduous trees - tree cotoneasters, tree euonymus, flowering crabs, mountain ash, red-bud, golden rain tree, hawthorne, tree lilac, green ash, hackberry, elms, linden, cottonwood, maple, birch, oaks, nut trees, locust.

Renovation

If a deciduous hedge has grown too large and "leggy," cut the hedge to the ground and shape the new growth that develops from the crowns of the plants. Shaping can be done by shearing or by selective pruning when the new growth is 10 to 15 inches tall. The base of the hedge should be kept wider than the top. Allow about 3 years to regenerate a 3 to 4 foot hedge of cotoneaster or privet.

Specimens of finely branched shrubs which are very overgrown can be handled as described for a hedge. Cut to the ground line after plants go dormant and reconstruct the plant using new growth from the crown. Spiraea, ninebark, Russian almond, little leaf mock orange, shrub roses and flowering quince are some examples. YOU WILL LOSE ONE OR TWO YEARS OF FLOWERING WHEN THIS APPROACH IS USED.



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