



Prune Plants in Early Spring

Our green thumbs are itching, but it's too early to dig. What's an eager gardener to do before the soil warms? Grab your pruners.

Don't be afraid. It is true there are some pruning jobs best left to professionals, but there are many more spring trimming and shaping projects you are fully qualified to perform.

The benefits of routine pruning are many. Carefully pruned plants grow and bloom with more vigor. Pruning out dead or damaged branches of woody plants reduce the risk of disease or insect infestations.

Shaping plants when they are devoid of leaves makes it easier to spot and correct structural imperfections.

First rule of pruning: prune cautiously. You can always prune more, but once a cut is made even duct tape won't help if you change your mind.

Clematis

March is an ideal time to prune clematis if they began blooming late last summer. These clematis are vigorous growers blooming on new growth. Cut these all the way back to the first pair of swelling buds, usually found about a foot above the ground. Remove all the stems above this point.

Be careful pruning the rest of your clematis. Stay away from those that bloomed early to avoid removing this year's flowers. It's best to prune these after they have finished flowering in June.

If you have clematis that blooms twice – once early and then a second flush later in summer, prune out dead or weak stems only. Weak stems are identified by the lack of any or very few swelling buds. Cut these stems back to where they join the vine's main stem.

Ornamental Grasses

Cut back your ornamental grasses now to avoid accidental damage to newly emerging shoots and to open the base of the plant to the spring sunshine.

Small grasses can be pruned with hand shears. Mature clumps of Miscanthus will require hedge clippers. Wear gloves to protect your hands from sharp leaf blades.

Start at the outer edge of the clump and cut dried stems to within a couple inches of the ground.

Evergreen and semi-evergreen grasses should not be cut to the ground. This robust type of pruning may damage these plants. Instead, gently pull dead or damaged leaf blades from the clump.

Roses



First, put your rose gloves on. Rose canes have thorns that can be quite vicious.

Pruning roses may seem intimidating, but they are actually among the easiest woody plants to prune. Start by removing dead canes; they are easy to identify. They are usually discolored and bear no swelling buds or new growth.

Remove any old canes that have been damaged by unwelcome winter visitors. Prune these all the way to the ground. Also remove any spindly stems.

Next check for the potential for new growth on each cane. Mature canes carry most of their buds a couple feet above the ground. If you leave all of these, it will result in a lot of top growth that will make the rose look leggy. Remove some of these older canes to encourage new growth from the base of the plant.

Thinning roses gives them a more open habit and will also reduce the early onset of powdery mildew on susceptible varieties. Cut back old canes to about a foot. Make the cut just above an outward-facing bud to direct the plant's growth outward.

Shrub roses need little pruning. Light tip pruning is often all that is required. Hybrid tea roses should be pruned aggressively to encourage healthy new growth and heavy flower production.

Strong long canes of climbing roses should be preserved to define the structure of the plant, but prune tip dieback to a pair of swelling buds. Remove any dead or damaged canes to encourage new growth from the base of the rose.

Leave the shovel in the garden shed, grab your pruners and some gloves, and enjoy some time in your garden. Your green thumbs will thank you for it.



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