

# PlantAmnesty ▲▲▲

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## PRUNING GUIDE

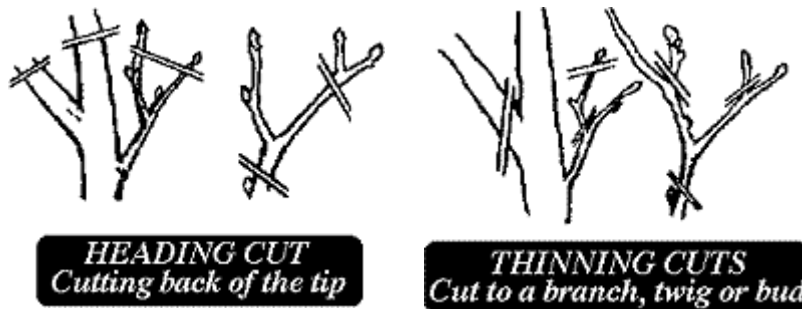
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**Reno, Nevada**  
**USDA Zones 4, 5a, & 5b**

**DON'T:** Ornamental trees should never, ever be topped. And shrubs should rarely be sheared (except real topiary and formal hedges). Stripping all of the side branches off of a mature pine or any other tree or shrub, is also a no-no. Stripping is not to be confused with selective thinning, which can also make shrubs and trees look open and Oriental.

**DO:** Prune to enhance a plant's natural beauty; to make it feel less oppressive, tidier, cleaner; to reduce size somewhat, depending on the of plant. Selective pruning will reduce the bulk of the plant and taking off a few lower limbs of a tree is okay.

**How:** The two types of pruning cuts are thinning and heading. A heading cut is basically cutting off the tip or end of a branch, twig, or stem. Heading creates bushiness. The next spring growth is stimulated at the tips of cut branches. Shearing, topping and pinching are heading cuts. Not good for most shrubs and trees.



A thinning cut removes the branch back to another branch or twig, or to the ground. Most pruning consists of thinning cuts. It forces new growth in existing branches and spreads new growth more evenly throughout the plant. Thinning cuts will let light into the interior, allowing for green branches to cut to if you choose to reduce the size of your shrub. It stays "done" longer and looks natural.

### PRUNING BY HABIT

Prune to enhance the plant's natural shape or "habit". Plants have one of three basic habits.

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## I. CANE GROWERS

Plants that renew themselves by sending up new branches called canes from the base. Forsythias, roses, bamboo, kerria, weigela --- very tough plants --- you can hardly hurt them.

Stare at your shrub.

Take out all dead wood. Always do this first.

Take out some (1/3 to 1/8) of the biggest and oldest, as well as a few of the puniest canes, to the base. Do this every year to keep the size controlled.

Pick out a few of the worst canes that rub or cross each other, that look sick or go the wrong way (that is, start at the outside, head back through the center and out the other side), and ugly branches (usually too straight).

Generally, prune to open up the center.

Tidy up the top with thinning cuts. Cut back anything hanging on the ground and cut to a side branch or bud.

Prune with vigor!



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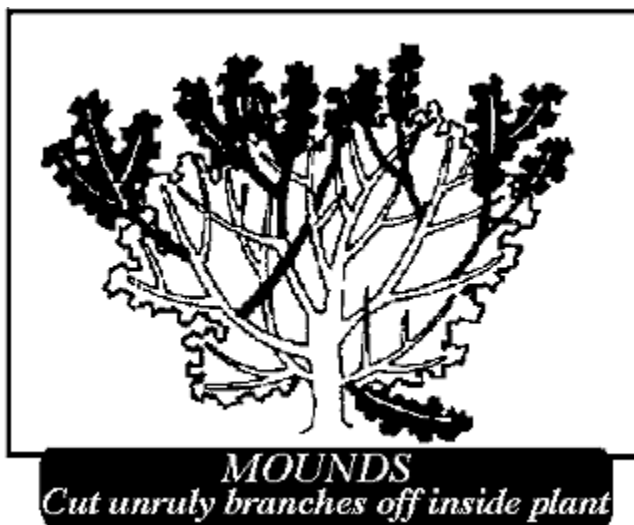
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## II. MOUNDS

Look like mounds and are medium-tough plants, found in mass plantings. They have small leaves and supple branches. You usually just want to tidy them up or reduce their size. People like to shear these -- don't you! Examples of mounds are abelias, escallonia, barberries and Mexican orange. These are easiest to make and deep small.

Locate the longest, most unruly branch. Grab the tip with your left hand. Follow the branch down into the interior of the plant with your right-hand pruners, and snip it off two inches to one foot below the general surface level of your shrub. Cut to a side branch or bud, if possible.

These shrubs often benefit from taking out some of the old canes to their base. This opens up and renews the shrub. Any dead wood or weeds should also be removed.



## III. TREE-LIKES

Best let to get big. Not to be pruned heavy-handedly. Good selective pruning can open them up and make them look less oppressive, can train branches around gutters and off of houses, and can bring more beauty out of your plant. These shrubs are the hardest to do. Never remove more than 1/8 total leaf surface in one year. It stresses them or it can cause a watersprout-rebound effect --- ick! Tree-likes have stiff-ish branches, generally. Examples of tree-likes include rhododendrons, andromeda (pieris), magnolias, deciduous Viburnums, camellias and witch hazel.

Most tree-likes just need to have all of the dead wood taken out. If

you still want to do more:

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Take out suckers (straight-up, skinny branches from the base and trunk of the shrub or tree.

Take out any big crossing, rubbing branches and double leaders (two main top branches with a narrow branch-crotch angle) on trees.

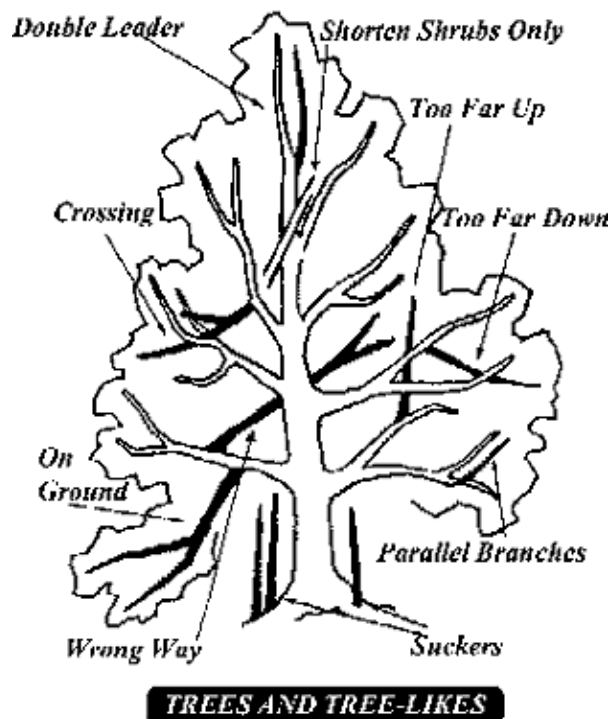
Take back or remove any branches hanging on the ground, if only up 1/2".

Take out the worst of the smaller crossing, rubbing branches --- choosing the healthiest and best placed branch to remain.

Prune to shorten or completely remove the worst wrong-way branches that start from the outside of the shrub, and go the wrong way back into the center and out the other side. Sometimes a side branch has a smaller branch that heads too far up into the next "layer", or goes too far down. You can cut some of these off to add more definition to your shrub's branches.

If you have two parallel branches rather close together, it may look better to remove one. If you have three parallel branches you may want to remove the center one. This will make things look nicer.

Before you finish, stand back and observe. If necessary, you may sparingly shorten some branches on tree like shrubs (not trees). Cut back to a side branch.



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## HINTS & TIPS

On many shrubs and trees, especially tree-likes, you want to fix things slowly over three -to five years. Do some now, come back next year.

"Wander, ponder; and prune," the old saying goes. Pruners, always stare at their shrubs, trying to locate unwanted branches, imagining their shrubs without this or that branch, seeing how it will grow next year --- seeing what needs to be done. Much like a haircut, it's easy to take it off, hard to put back on. Know when to quit.

If a plant is really too big, you may want to move it, remove it (go ahead, be ruthless!) or renovate it (not dealt with here). But try real selective pruning first!

## HELPFUL LISTS

### Mounds (Grab & Snip)

Acuba  
Abelia  
Rock Rose  
Boxwood  
Snowberry  
Evergreen Azaleas  
Barberries (Some canes)  
Dwarf Sand Cherry  
Burning Bush  
Potentillas (Cane-like, too)  
Evergreen Viburnums (Somewhat tree-like as well)  
Spiraeas  
Hollies  
Scotch Broom  
Japanese Holly  
Box Honeysuckle

### Cane Growers (Cut canes to the ground)

Roses  
Oregon Grape  
Lilac  
Weigelas  
Wild Oregon Grape  
Nandina (Heavenly Bamboo)  
Red-twig Dogwood  
Buddleia (Butterfly Bush)  
Hydrangea

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Dwarf Flowering Almond

Deutzia

Forsythia

## Tree-Likes (Thin-out, many small cuts)

Elderberry

Manzanita

Kalmia

Deciduous Azaleas

Pieris (Andromeda)

Rhododendrons

Enkianthus

Mugho Pine

Lilac

Viburnums:

Leatherleaf

Double-file

Highbush Cranberry

Winter

Snowball

Spindletrees

Water sprouts easily, therefore thin lightly:

Cotoneaster

Hamamelis

Cherry

Crabapple

Filbert (Hazelnut)

Fig

Parrotia

Magnolia

Plum

Dogwood

Takes heavy thinning or arborizing:

Laurel

Pine

Photinia

Mature Rhododendrons

## Tough Tree-Likes

(Can be headed into hedges or let go natural)

Photinia, Pyracantha, Yew, Privet, Laurel