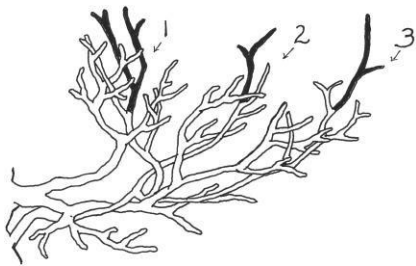


Decluttering a Plant

By Ellie Bender

When people complain that their plant has become too big, they tend to think they need to shrink the size of the plant... but sometimes all that's needed is to open up the center! Decluttering is everywhere these days. Getting rid of unnecessary junk reduces stress. Why not declutter your plants while you're at it?

The best place to prune is from inside the plant. Most people, when faced with a plant that feels imposing, try to cut back the edges to "keep it in line." This helps temporarily, but then the plant has a growth spurt, getting denser where you cut, and you are back to square one, or worse. Instead of trying to get your plant to fit within its allotted space bubble, try opening the plant up, reducing the mess inside. You'll end up with a plant that looks graceful and natural, instead one that looms over your garden. Here's how:



- Start with the big D's- Remove all dead wood. Take out anything that is diseased or damaged. Sometimes it can be hard to tell whether wood is dead or not, especially when pruning during dormancy. You can often tell by looking at the buds, or by cutting the twig and looking at the interior. Is it green or white? Then it's likely alive. If it's brown and dry, it's probably dead. Broken limbs, or branches with the bark rubbed off should be removed as well. This initial pruning clarifies your plant. Now you can see what you have to work with.

- Make the big cuts first. Whether you are dealing with an overgrown Japanese maple or a tangled viburnum, your methods will be similar. Look for the limbs that cross through the middle of the plant, disrupting the form. Remove these first. Big cuts make a big difference, so be brave. Think of the flow of the branches, from large at the trunk, gradually thinning to the tips of the twigs. The branches should be evenly spaced around the trunk. Where two branches cross, determine which enhances the form and remove the other.

- Get inside the plant. From inside or underneath, you can see exactly where light is coming through the leaves. You can identify areas that are dense, and thin these out to let light in. You also have a much better view of the inner branches and leaves that aren't getting enough

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light to thrive, the ones that are spindly and sad. Removing these creates room around the trunk and space between branches.

- As you create space in the middle, thin the outer branches to allow light to reach the interior growth. This makes the plant look lighter and keeps it healthier by discouraging disease and pests. Airflow is important in preventing many diseases.
- Be careful not to over- thin! It is easy to get carried away and take out too much. Move around the plant so you aren't too focused on one area. Stand back to look frequently. If you aren't sure what to do next, walk away for a bit. Look at it with fresh eyes and you will better see the big picture.
- When your plant is airy and light (or at least airier and lighter), stop for this year. You can always do more next year.