

Your garden in June - pruning

The art of pruning

....or how not to get carried away when holding a pair of secateurs!

There's no 'one-size fits all' rule to pruning. Shrubs come in all shapes and sizes and often have different pruning requirements. Some need pruning every year while others don't need pruning at all. Some can be cut back really hard and will regrow, and some will die if cut back hard. The important thing is to check what each plant needs **before** going in with the secateurs!



Why do we prune?

Most people only think of pruning when a shrub gets too big and needs 'hacking back'! However, there are other important reasons to prune regularly: to remove dead, damaged, crossing or diseased wood; to allow light and air into the middle of the plant which helps ripen the wood for flowering; to shape the plant; and to maintain a shrub's vigour and flowering capabilities.

One key thing to remember is that pruning encourages vigorous growth. The harder you cut back, the more vigorous the new growth. So if a shrub is uneven, prune the weak growth hard, and the strong growth lightly or not at all. It seems a bit counter-intuitive from a visual perspective, but it does work!

How to prune

Deciduous shrubs that bloom before mid June flower on wood produced the previous year. They should be pruned immediately after flowering to allow new growth to be produced for next year's flowers. So if you haven't already done it, now is the time to prune shrubs that have finished flowering such as forsythia,

philadelphus, flowering currant (*Ribes*), deutzia, kolwitzia, and weigela.

Deciduous shrubs that flower after mid-summer - eg buddleja, lavatera, fuchsia -

produce flowers on growth made in the current year. They should be pruned hard in spring before they start into growth.

Evergreen shrubs are best pruned when in active growth between May and August, making sure you don't disturb any nesting birds. The pruning requirements of a cistus are very different from a laurel or a rhododendron so it is always wise to check first.

If your shrubs have become top heavy, old and woody, or very twiggy, don't despair. By pruning them selectively over a two or three year period most plants can be reshaped and given a new lease of life.