Pruning shrubs regularly at the best time of year for flowering, reshaping plants to fit the space with a few well-placed cuts.
Pruning shrubs

Different pruning methods

Pruning shrubs

Raising the canopy

For shrubs that have become too large for the border (here *Philadelphus*), consider raising the canopy to allow the plants below to have more light and space. Raising the canopy also creates airy screens and transforms amorphous shrubs into interesting features. Remove shorter stems, thin spindly growth and the lower sideshoots of the main stems to reveal the lower section of bare branches.

Thin out the older stems as appropriate (taking out no more than a third) to create an aesthetically pleasing framework.

Reducing the size of evergreens

Many evergreens just require an annual trim - in summer or timed to follow flowering if this is significant - but neglected plants can be brought back under control by a two-stage process. In mid-spring, lightly prune the whole shrub, taking off a small length of stem from each tip. This will remove the apical dominance and stimulate buds to break lower down the stem. Then, in midsummer, prune back harder to the desired size and shape, cutting to a bud where possible and, if not, cutting to within the overall shape to hide the cut. This method is less severe than pruning back hard in one stage.

Removing one in three

Pruning out a proportion of old stems each year is appropriate for shrubs that regularly produce new shoots from the base and quickly become congested. Overgrown or congested shrubs that do not respond well to hard pruning can also be renovated over several years by gradual rejuvenation. In the early spring of the first year take out a third of all old stems close to the base and reduce all other stems in length by a third.

The following year take out half of the old stems and prune back the year’s growth as appropriate for its flowering period. In the third year remove all the remaining old stems and continue pruning to shape.

Also applicable to:

- *Abelia*
- *Corylus avellana*
- *Garrya elliptica*
- *Hamamelis*
- *Magnolia*
- *Mahonia x media*
- *Philadelphus*
- *Ribes sanguineum*
- *Rosa* (many shrub roses)
- *Viburnum*
- *Viburnum tinus*

Also applicable to:

- *Elaeagnus*
- *Escallonia*
- *Hebe*
- *Olearia*
- *Osmanthus*
- *Pittosporum*
- *Skimmia*
- *Viburnum tinus*

Hybrid musk rose ‘Felicia’ pruned in early spring to remove a third of old stems and open up the centre.

Choisy pruned in June, after flowering.

Also applicable to:

- *Abelia*
- *Corylus avellana*
- *Garrya elliptica*
- *Hamamelis*
- *Magnolia*
- *Mahonia x media*
- *Philadelphus*
- *Ribes sanguineum*
- *Rosa* (many shrub roses)
- *Viburnum*
- *Viburnum tinus*

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