

Fenway Victory Gardens - Tree/Shrub Pruning Tutorial

Maintaining a garden in the Fenway Victory Gardens comes with a commitment to honor FGS rules and regulations that address plant height, visibility, and shade/encroachment. But what does that mean for existing trees and shrubs in our plots?

To keep within the Garden Society's guidelines for both shrubs and plot trees, construct a maintenance plan that includes pruning at the optimal season and incorporates needed strategies of thinning, heading, renewal and rejuvenation techniques. Time of pruning varies with species, with many woody plants pruned according to their flowering period.

- If plants are spring-flowering (e.g., lilacs, forsythia, viburnum, weigela), they are ordinarily pruned soon AFTER bloom. Next year's blooms begin to develop over fall and winter, so timeliness is important to allow for sufficient growth and bud development.
- If plants are summer-flowering, they are generally pruned during the dormant winter period BEFORE active spring growth occurs. Examples of plants to be pruned in early spring include butterfly bush, privet, Rose of Sharon, spirea, junipers, yews, some hydrangeas, and arborvitae.

By removing old canes and controlling height and spread on an annual basis, gardeners can enjoy prolonged vigor and beauty of their trees and shrubs, while also honoring their agreement as gardeners in the Fenway Victory Gardens.

The following is a checklist of steps and techniques to take when you are about to prune your plot shrub or tree:

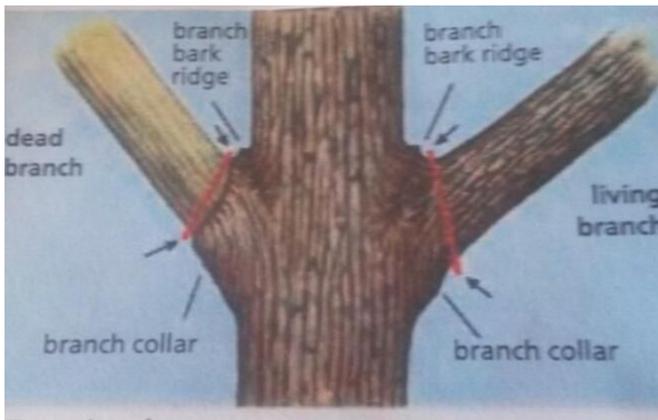
Step #1 – Identify. Know the type of shrub or tree in need of pruning – more than likely, you're already aware of its species and type and can easily determine best timing for pruning (*if a flowering type, refer to above*). If not flowering, refer to online advice re: best shapes and techniques for that plant type.

Step #2 – Observe. Take a step back and observe the tree or shrub. How does it compare to its type's natural form, height, and growth pattern? Does it carry a lot of dead wood? Is it dense and in need of thinning to allow light into inner-core? Could it use a rejuvenation of foliage or blooms? Is it out of FGS compliance for height and/or visibility regulations?

Step #3 – Be Safe! Before beginning any physical work on your plant, be sure to have (and use!) the correct safety glasses and work gloves, and the right equipment (anvil-type pruners, loppers for thicker branches, long-reach pruners for hard-to-reach branches). All materials noted may be requested for loan; please work with your Area Director or VP of the Park.

Step #4 – Know when help is required. If large limbs are broken or hanging, or if high climbing is required, it's a job for a professional arborist. Please consult with VP of the Park for how to get needed assistance.

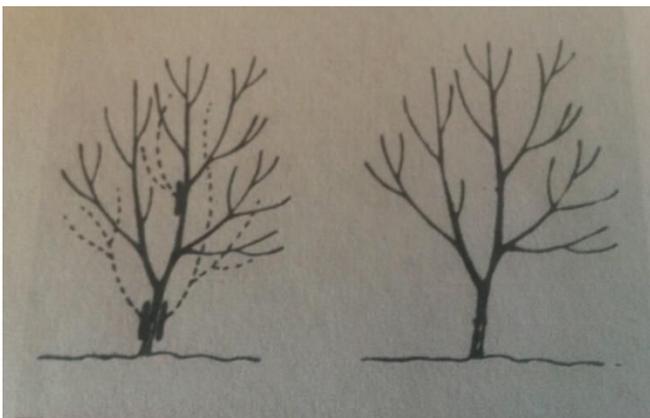
Before you begin --- **Know your Pruning Cuts!**



Be sure not to cut too close to the area at the base of the limb adjacent to the main trunk. This illustration indicates the most beneficial cut line to avoid wounding the tree/shrub.

Thinning Cut

USDA Forestry Service



Purdue Extension Consumer Horticulture

Thinning Cuts – Tree View

Note: Some corrective pruning – particularly on trees/shrubs that have not had proper maintenance – is best done over time, and that a good rule of thumb is not to remove more than 25% of any growth in one season unless doing a rejuvenation (which cuts all growth flush to the ground).

Now you're ready to begin:

Step #5 – Start by removing dead, diseased, and broken wood, including deep inside the inner-core. Work from the ground up and inside branches to outer ones. After clearing unwanted branches, take a step back and observe. This may be enough to create good visibility and form. If not, proceed to Step #6

Step #6 – Continue thinning by removing branches that are oddly twisted or cross over into another quadrant (visualize a four-slice pie). Remove also any branches that are crossing or rubbing against each other. As you're working, remember to take frequent breaks to step back and observe your work. The goal is to distribute cuts evenly throughout the plant.

Step #7 – Resist the urge to over-prune. The tree or shrub does not need to look perfect. The planting may at first look bare or unbalanced. The plant will heal fast and rejuvenate through new growth to great form in due time.

Step #8 – Do not top your trees! It may seem logical to cut back all branches of a tree or shrub to reduce its overall height. However, cutting main branches back to stubs is one of the worst things you can do for your tree or shrub. Stubs will tend to grow back a lot of weakly attached branches that are even more likely to break

in extreme weather. It will also reduce the amount of foliage, on which the tree depends for the food and nourishment needed for regrowth.

Step #9 – Observe and judge the final form. Have you improved the overall look of the shrub or tree? Does it now have an open inner-core, free from dead wood, tangled or crossed branches? Have you brought the tree or shrub into compliance by creating better visibility into your garden or brought down the height of the planting to the required five feet?

Step #10 – Congratulations. You've created a more open garden plot while also reinvigorating your shrub or tree for a healthier plant and renewed growth and blooms.

Need assistance?

The FGS Tree Committee is available to provide hands-on advice before you begin work. Contact us at trees@fenwayvictorygardens.org *We welcome your comments and questions!*

For more information on pruning trees and shrubs:

Purdue Extension Consumer Horticulture, *Pruning Ornamental Trees and Shrubs:*

<https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/HO/HO-4-W.pdf>

U.S.D.A. Forestry Service, *How to Prune Trees:*

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/naspf/sites/default/files/publications/htprunerev2012.pdf>