Proper Pruning Employee Training Manual

We originally wrote this manual to train our landscape crews. We're sharing it so homeowners and other landscape professionals can see how we approached pruning in everyday residential landscapes. The examples reflect our work in the southeastern United States. Use them with the plant, local conditions, and the goals for the landscape in mind.

#1 – Introduction to Proper Pruning

A. The Problem with Indiscriminate Shearing

Most homeowners and landscape maintenance crews have limited knowledge of proper pruning techniques. Too often, power hedge trimmers become the go-to tool for every situation—leading to:

- **Indiscriminate Cuts** – Repeated use of gas or electric trimmers creates a uniform "green shell" of foliage and makes larger leaved plants look ragged.
- **Susceptibility to Pests and Disease** – By continually trimming the outermost foliage only, the plant's interior loses access to light and air flow. Stagnant conditions invite disease and insects to thrive.
- **Stunted or Irregular Growth** – Over time, excessive shearing leads to a thin veneer of foliage on the outside but weak stems underneath. It becomes harder to control the plant's size and shape in the long run.
- **Premature Plant Replacement** – When plants are repeatedly mispruned, they may die earlier or become unsightly, prompting unnecessary replacements. Proper pruning can prevent these avoidable costs, saving money and reducing waste.

B. Our Philosophy on Proper Pruning

At our company, we focus on the following:

1. **Plant Identification** – We take time to identify each plant species before pruning. Different plants have different growth habits, flowering times, and pruning requirements.
2. **Functional and Aesthetic Balance** – Our goal is to create a natural, attractive look while maintaining the plant's health and desired size. Proper pruning strikes a balance between beauty and vitality.
3. **Efficiency Without Carelessness** – While we do take care to make accurate cuts, we also recognize the need to work efficiently. In the next module, we'll dive into techniques that balance care with productivity.

C. Pruning Practices: The Essentials

1. **Avoid Over-Shearing**
    - Our approach is to choose the cut that suits the plant and the job. Shearing has a place, especially for formal hedges, light shaping, and some early-season size reduction. On vigorous shrubs with thin stems, new growth can soon cover clipped leaves. Before shearing, check how the plant responds and whether the cut will remove flower buds.
    - *If the plants haven't been oversheared*, shearing in the late spring and summer may be okay, especially for small leaved plants like boxwoods, Japanese hollies, drift roses, and sunshine ligustrum.
    - Shearing can even be done in late season if very light and not too many large leaves are cut.
    - **Caution**: Indiscriminate shearing or using shears on plants with large leaves (e.g., anise, chindos, rhododendrons) results in unsightly cuts.

- **Outcome**: When used judiciously, shearing can reduce the size of plants early in the season, maintain neat look by cutting few wispy branches anytime, and maintain formal hedges or tight shapes without sacrificing plant health.

2. **Cut Inside the Canopy (often to "unshear" a plant)**
    - **Why**: Making selective cuts well inside the canopy allows air and sunlight to reach inner branches and leaves.
    - **Method**: Identify older, woody stems and make thinning cuts back to a main trunk or healthy lateral branch. This helps correct structural issues due to past over-shearing.
    - **Benefit**: Improved air circulation reduces pest and disease pressure and encourages balanced growth.
3. **Do Hard Pruning on Overgrown Shrubs**
    - **Typical Scenario**: Many landscape shrubs, especially older ones, become oversized if neglected or if they've been repeatedly sheared.
    - **Timing**: Perform hard pruning in late winter or early spring, after hard freezes and before new growth begins in earnest.
    - **Extent**: Treat one-third as a rough guide for routine shrub pruning. A harder cutback is an option for healthy, established shrubs of species known to recover from it. If you're unsure how the plant will respond, reduce it in stages.
    - **Safety Check**: Many conifers, including common junipers and arborvitae, won't reliably regrow from bare old wood. Keep live foliage on the branches you shorten unless you've confirmed that the species can resprout from old wood. True yews are a common exception.
4. **Seasonal Timing: Avoid Hard Pruning in the Late Summer and Fall**
    - **Reason**: Significant pruning in late summer or autumn can stimulate tender new growth that won't have time to harden off before winter.
    - **Consequence**: Cold temperatures can damage or kill these tender shoots, leaving the plant with unsightly dieback or increased vulnerability to disease.
    - **Best Practice**: If trimming is necessary in late summer or fall, focus on light maintenance pruning—removing dead or damaged branches, or lightly shaping without cutting deeply into the canopy. Thinning a cold sensitive plant late in the season removes natural insulation. It is okay to cut most perennials down close to ground in the fall.

D. Additional Tips & Best Practices

1. **Use the Right Tool for the Job**
    - **Manual Bypass Hand Pruners** – for very small to small stems that need to be cut quickly (the movement of the blades is usually faster than power hand pruners).
    - **Small Power Bypass Hand Pruners** – particularly good for deep cutting in early season.
    - **Large Power Bypass Hand Pruners** – for medium-sized branches (up to 1–1½ inches), especially for cleaning up low tree branches in lawn areas and heavy pruning to reduce plant size.
    - **Pruning Saws** – for larger, woody branches.

    - **Hedge Shears** – for cutting small stemmed plants heavily in early season, maintaining shape on small leaved shrubs, and very light pruning on most shrubs most times of year.

2. **Match the cut to the job.** To shorten a twig or small stem, cut just above a healthy bud pointing in the direction you want growth to go. To shorten a branch to a side branch, choose a lateral large enough to take over. To remove a branch entirely, cut just outside the branch collar. Leave the collar intact and avoid leaving a long stub.
3. **Clean Tools** – Remove sap and debris from blades after each job. When you cut suspected diseased tissue, clean and disinfect the blades before using them on healthy tissue or another plant. Follow the disinfectant label and any disease-specific guidance.
4. **Know Plants' Flowering Habits**
    - Some shrubs bloom on old wood (e.g., most traditional blue/pink hydrangeas (macrophylla or "big leaf"), forsythia, azaleas), while others bloom on new growth (e.g., little lime, butterfly, some varieties of big leaf hydrangeas such as Penny Mac and most roses).
    - When in doubt prune right after a plant blooms to avoid removing next season's buds.

E. Long-Term Cost Savings and Plant Health

- **Reduced Replacement Costs**: Healthy, well-maintained shrubs and trees live longer, need fewer replacements, and retain their aesthetic value.
- **Fewer Pest & Disease Treatments**: By encouraging natural ventilation and sunlight, you cut down on chemical treatments and save on application costs.
- **Enhanced Landscape Appearance**: Properly pruned plants look more balanced and appealing, increasing property value and curb appeal.

Conclusion

Pruning is as much an art form as it is a science. By following these essential guidelines—avoiding over-shearing, cutting inside the plant's canopy, and pruning at the right time of year—you ensure that our landscapes remain attractive and healthy for years to come. The upfront effort you invest in learning proper pruning techniques pays dividends in lower costs and better plant health for our customers.

#2 – Proper Pruning vs. "Perfect Pruning"

A. Introduction

Pruning is essential for keeping residential landscapes both healthy and attractive. However, some horticultural purists teach pruning methods that are extremely detailed, which we refer to here as **"perfect pruning"**. In most real-world scenarios—especially for tough, fast-growing shrubs—such exacting methods aren't necessary. Instead, a more practical "proper pruning" approach strikes a balance between plant health, efficiency, and aesthetics. Proper pruning is between the laziness of shearing everything and the perfectionism of making perfect cuts every time.

B. Why This Matters

- **Practicality**: Most homeowners don't have the budget to pay us for "perfect pruning."
- **Plant Resilience**: The majority of commonly used landscape shrubs are hardy and recover well from less meticulous pruning.
- **Efficient Maintenance**: Knowing how to prune quickly and effectively ensures the entire landscape remains attractive without overburdening your schedule and your customer's budget.

C. Defining "Perfect" vs. "Proper" Pruning

1. **"Perfect" Pruning**
    - **Characteristics**: Every branch is cut with surgical accuracy, often just above a node or lateral branch, with an aim for textbook precision.
    - **Pros**: Strict adherence to high horticultural standards.
    - **Cons**: Time-consuming and typically unnecessary for most shrubs.
2. **Proper Pruning**
    - **Characteristics**: Respects essential horticultural science—like correct timing and keeping plants open to light and air—without requiring a perfect cut on every branch.
    - **Pros**: Faster, more cost-effective, and sufficient for most plants you'll encounter.
    - **Cons**: Purists (e.g., Plant Amnesty) may dismiss it as "imprecise," although plant health is rarely impacted in a meaningful way. Purists also focus on the difficult plants and usually don't acknowledge how common very tough plants are in most landscapes. An expert that is an excellent resource for proper pruning is Jim Putnam (horttube.com).

D. Indiscriminate vs. Selective Pruning

Shearing is one of the four main types of pruning cuts and is not wrong in itself—it can be a valid technique when used strategically. However, problems arise when it's done too often or without regard for the plant's natural shape:

- **Over-Shearing**
    - **What it is**: Using hedge trimmers haphazardly on every shrub until it's just a tight box or ball, often repeatedly throughout the year.
    - **Drawbacks**:
        - Leads to overly dense exteriors, can block airflow and light, potentially increasing pests or disease.
        - Larger leaved plants look ragged

        - Tight shearing late in growing season when most outer leaves are cut makes the plant look rough through fall and winter.
        - Generally required more pruning per year.

- **Selective Pruning**
    - **What it is**: Intentionally choosing where and how to cut, whether through reduction cuts, thinning cuts, heading cuts, or an occasional strategic shear.
    - **Advantages**: Helps maintain a more natural shape, allows light into the interior of the plant, and keeps the shrub healthy without the need for overly precise "perfect pruning."

E. Balancing Health and Efficiency

- **Prioritize Plant Needs**: Remove diseased or damaged branches first.
- **Use the Right Cut**: Shearing (if needed), heading, thinning, or reduction—each has its place.
- **Avoid Over-Pruning**: Generally, don't remove more than one-third of the plant at a time unless you're doing a rejuvenation prune on a tough species that is well established.

F. Practical Tips and Best Practices

1. **Sharp and Clean Tools**: Dull blades tear plant tissue, increasing stress and the chance of infection.
2. **Timing Is Key**: Most ornamental shrubs respond best to pruning just before or during their active growing season.
3. **Match the Cut to the Job:** Shorten a twig just above a healthy bud. When removing a whole branch, cut just outside the branch collar and avoid leaving a long stub.
4. **Learn Plant Preferences**: Some species (e.g., roses, trees) do need more precise cuts.

G. Starbucks Analogy and Proper Pruning: The Right Balance of Quality and Practicality

Before Starbucks, coffee options were either cheap and bad or expensive and elite. Starbucks introduced good-quality coffee—not the absolute best, but something consistent, enjoyable, and accessible to the masses.

Proper Pruning follows the same philosophy. Instead of chasing "perfect" pruning—slow, costly, and often unnecessary—we focus on practical, science-backed pruning that keeps landscapes healthy, attractive, and cost-effective. Just like Starbucks made good coffee standard, we make proper pruning the smart, efficient standard in landscaping.

H. Summary

"Perfect pruning" is an idealized concept that rarely aligns with real-world conditions in everyday landscapes. By practicing **proper pruning**—adhering to basic horticultural principles but allowing for a bit of imperfection—you'll maintain attractive, healthy shrubs while saving time and money. Even simple techniques like strategic shearing or quick heading cuts are perfectly valid when done at the right time, with the right tools, and in moderation.

#3 – Pruning Essentials and Standard Practices

Module Overview

Pruning is both an art and a science. It helps maintain plant health, encourages new growth, and shapes plants for aesthetics. However, knowing where and how to start can be intimidating. This module covers safety essentials, cutting techniques, shrub forms, timing, and best practices for both deciduous and evergreen plants. By the end, you'll be confident making pruning decisions.

A. How to Stay Safe While Pruning

- **Keep your free hand well clear of the blades and their path, especially with powered pruners. Reposition yourself or the branch if you can't make the cut with your hands clear.**
- **Wear the Right Gear**
    - Wear safety-rated eye protection and gloves suited to the task and the tool.
    - Long sleeves/pants and closed-toed shoes or boots.
- **Use Proper Tools and Maintenance**
    - Keep pruning tools sharp and well-oiled.
    - Remove sap and debris from blades after each job. When you cut suspected diseased tissue, clean and disinfect the blades before using them on healthy tissue or another plant. Follow the disinfectant label and any disease-specific guidance.
- **Be Aware of Surroundings**
    - Remain vigilant for active wildlife (e.g., nests)
    - Work from stable footing. If a cut requires climbing or a ladder, or a branch is too heavy or high to remove safely, refer the job to a qualified arborist. If branches are near power lines, stay clear and contact the utility.

B. Four Types of Cuts

1. **Thinning Cut**
    - Purpose: Removes an entire branch or stem at its point of origin to open up the plant.
    - Improves air circulation, light penetration, and overall shape.
2. **Reduction Cut**
    - Purpose: Pruning cut reducing branch length to a smaller lateral branch, usually made with other reduction cuts to reduce size of the plant.
    - Best if lateral branch is at least one-third the diameter of the branch being removed.
3. **Heading Cut**
    - Purpose: Shortens a branch or stem to a specific point, encouraging fuller branching.
    - Used for shaping shrubs, maintaining size, and creating bushier growth.

- Should almost never be used on trees.

4. **Shearing – just doing many heading cuts at once**
    - Purpose: Creates a uniform or geometric shape (common in hedges/topiary), quick way to reduce size on plants with small stems and quick way to remove light, wispy foliage about anytime of the year.
    - Can lead to dense outer growth that shades inner branches if overused.

C. Order of Cuts to Make: Dead, Diseased, Damaged, and Deranged

1. **Dead** – Remove all dead wood first to improve appearance and reduce decay. This is a must and can be done anytime of the year, particularly with plants susceptible to disease.
2. **Diseased** – Remove diseased branches to stop the spread of infection.
3. **Damaged** – Cut away cracked, split, or broken branches.
4. **Deranged** – Remove crossing, rubbing, or oddly growing branches that disrupt shape.

This "4 D's" method ensures you tackle the most critical issues before addressing aesthetic concerns.

D. Types of Shrub Forms

- **Mounding Shrubs (e.g., drift rose, abelia, azaleas, aucuba) –** Mounding shrubs have a rounded, dome-like appearance. Key characteristics include:
    - Natural shape resembling an upside-down bowl.
    - Wider at the base than at the top.
- **Cane-Growing Shrubs (e.g., nandina, mahonia, forsythia, fatsia)** – Cane-growing shrubs have multiple stems growing from the base of the plant, creating a fountain-like appearance. Features of cane-growing shrubs include:
    - Sprout from the ground like water from a fountain.
    - Require regular pruning to maintain shape and prevent overgrowth.
    - Should prune older canes all the way to ground and some canes at different levels (right above a node) to fill in foliage if top heavy.
    - On cane-growing shrubs that tolerate renewal pruning, remove some of the oldest canes at the base. Reserve a complete cutback for established plants of species known to regrow well from the base.
- **Tree-Like Shrubs (e.g., rhododendrons, camellia, osmanthus)** – Tree-like shrubs have a stiff, woody branch structure that divides many times. Characteristics of tree-like shrubs are:
    - Articulate branch structure makes them more attractive
    - Many have a smaller pruning budget, requiring fewer and smaller cuts
    - These shrubs are obviously easier to make into tree form, but that often isn't the desired look. Be careful to not unintentionally start making a tree shape. This happens often with different types of ligustrum.

E. The "One-Third" Rule: When It Is Important and When It Is Not

- Treat one-third as a rough guide for routine shrub pruning. A harder cutback is an option for healthy, established shrubs of species known to recover from it. If you're unsure how the plant will respond, reduce it in stages.

F. How to Prune for Good Structure of a Plant, Especially Small Trees

- **Central Leader vs. Multiple Leaders**
    - Decide if the species is best with one main trunk or multiple stems.
    - Remove competing leaders for a strong trunk if a single-leader form is desired.
- **Branch Angles**
    - Keep branches with wider angles (45°–60°) to the trunk for stability.
    - Remove or shorten narrow-angled branches prone to breakage.
- **Raising the Canopy**
    - Gradually remove lower limbs as the tree matures.
    - Leave enough lower branches to maintain trunk strength.
- **Even Distribution**
    - Space branches around the trunk evenly for balance and good airflow.

G. Season specific tasks

- **Late Winter/Early Spring**
    - Cut back grasses, perennials, and groundcovers (as needed)
    - Prune heavily on overgrown, non/inconspicuous flowering plants (e.g., holly, Cleyera, ligustrum) and plants that bloom on new growth (e.g., Little Lime, butterfly bushes, roses) or have likely already bloomed (e.g., osmanthus, forsythia, fatsia, camellia, mahonia)
      IMPORTANT NOTE: Loropetalum usually blooms in early to mid spring. The flowers can be beautiful, BUT Loropetalum also can grow very fast. So it is often necessary to sacrifice blooms in order to reduce the size of the plant early in the season.
    - Very lightly prune plants that bloom on old wood (e.g., azaleas, gardenias, most bigleaf and oakleaf hydrangeas)
    - Late winter is a common time to make small structural cuts on many young deciduous trees. Check the species and local disease guidance before choosing a date.
    - Remove water sprouts and suckers
- **Mid to Late Spring**
    - Prune after blooms fade (e.g., azaleas, forsythia)
    - Deadhead flowers to extend blooming cycles
    - Remove water sprouts and suckers

- Thin overcrowded shrubs for air and light access

- **Summer**
  - Cut back most perennials after flowering, just enough to encourage new growth and hopefully more flowers
  - This is the time to shear more, but not too heavily…especially if thinning and reduction cuts were made to the plant earlier in the year
  - Remove water sprouts and suckers
  - Thin overcrowded shrubs for air and light access
  - Avoid heavy pruning if the plant is water-stressed
  - Deadhead flowering shrubs for extended blooms (e.g., Little Lime, butterfly bushes, roses)
- **Fall**
  - Remove dead wood to avoid pests overwintering
  - Prune very lightly for shape retention
  - Avoid cutting too much into the plant as this reduces its natural insulation
  - Remove water sprouts and suckers
  - Cut back most perennials (e.g., hostas, irises, and daylilies)
- **Outlier Plants – Those that "bleed" a lot of sap**
  - Some trees, including maples, birches, and dogwoods, can release visible sap after late-winter or early-spring cuts. This usually does little harm. If sap flow is the main concern and the work can wait, choose a suitable time after the leaves have fully expanded.

H. Timing of Pruning to Maximize Blooms (Old vs. New Growth)

- **Flowering on Old Wood**
  - Plants form flower buds on last year's stems (e.g., lilacs, azaleas, most traditional blue/pink hydrangeas).
  - Prune immediately after flowering to avoid cutting off next year's buds.
  - The traditional blue/pink Hydrangea macrophylla or "big leaf" hydrangeas are a difficult case. They bloom on old wood, can bloom late season, and have long lasting blooms. By the time the plant has finished blooming it is already creating blooms for the following year and it is late in the season, when you shouldn't prune heavily. AND established hydrangeas can grow really fast. So, you often have to prune when the plant has just started blooming when controlling the size is needed. Communication to the customer is key here: when creating the quote make a comment to customer that nice looking hydrangea blooms will need to be cut in order to reduce the size of the plant. There are remontant (bloom on old and new wood) big leaf hydrangeas (such as Penny Mac), but unless we planted them it is very hard to determine what if you are pruning one of these varieties.
- **Flowering on New Wood**
  - Plants set buds on the current season's growth (e.g., most roses, butterfly bushes, Little Lime and Limelight hydrangeas).

- Prune in late winter or early spring for more vigorous, bloom-ready shoots. Many will rebloom if spent blooms are cut (e.g., most roses, butterfly bushes, Little Lime and Limelight hydrangeas).

I. Cutting Suckers and Water Sprouts

- **Suckers**
  - Shoots that emerge at or below the graft union (or from the roots).
  - Remove promptly to conserve the main plant's energy.
- **Water Sprouts**
  - Rapid, vertical shoots on trunks or main branches.
  - Can disrupt a balanced form; remove or shorten as they appear.
- **Timing**
  - Cut suckers and water sprouts whenever they form.
  - Use clean, sharp tools to avoid tearing bark or spreading disease. Small suckers and water sprouts on tough plants, such as crape myrtles, can usually be pulled off without damage.

J. Specifics on Pruning Conifers

- **Growth Habits**
  - Many conifers, including common junipers and arborvitae, won't reliably regrow from bare old wood. Keep live foliage on the branches you shorten unless you've confirmed that the species can resprout from old wood. True yews are a common exception.
  - Prune lightly to maintain shape. Focus on thinning and reduction cuts.
  - Light, infrequent shearing is okay for many conifers.
- **Timing**
  - Late winter or early spring is often best.
  - You have a little more leeway with pruning conifers in late summer because they are generally very cold hardy in our zone of 8a and they usually have more growth than deciduous and broadleaf evergreens in the fall.
  - For pines, consider "candling" (pinching back the new growth tips) to control size.
- **Techniques**
  - Keep live foliage on the branches you shorten unless you've confirmed that the species can resprout from old wood.
  - Keep enough green foliage for recovery.

K. Three-Cut Method for Branches Heavy Enough to Tear Bark

Use this method when a branch's weight could pull it down before the cut is complete. The risk comes from the weight and position of the branch, regardless of the cutting tool. Refer limbs you can't remove safely to a qualified arborist.

1. **First Cut (Undercut)**
    - A small notch on the underside of the branch a few inches from the trunk.
    - Prevents bark from tearing when the branch drops.
2. **Second Cut (Top Cut)**
    - A few inches farther out from the undercut, cutting all the way through the branch.
    - Removes the weight of the branch in a controlled manner.
3. **Final Cut (Clean-Up Cut)**
    - Make a clean cut just outside the branch collar, cutting all the way through the branch.
    - Promotes proper sealing and healing.

L. Quick Pruning of Soft Shoots by Pulling Them with a Gloved Hand

- **Ideal Shoots**
    - Tender, new growth can often be simply pinched or pulled off.
    - Common on herbaceous or fast-growing perennials, and thin suckers and water sprouts on woody plants.
- **Method**
    - For woody plants lightly tug and twist to remove shoots without damaging older stems.
    - Efficient for routine tidying; reduces reliance on tools.
- **Caution**
    - Ensure the shoot is genuinely soft. If resistance is high, use bypass pruners instead.

M. Renovation and Rejuvenation Pruning (very similar and sometimes used interchangeably)

1. Renovation Pruning

- **Definition:** A pruning technique aimed at reviving overgrown, neglected, or poorly shaped shrubs and trees to restore their aesthetic appeal and functionality. It often involves cutting back a significant portion of the plant to stimulate new growth.
- **Key Features:**
    - Focuses on improving the overall appearance and health of the plant.
    - Involves removing dead, diseased, or damaged wood.
    - Gradually reduces plant size while maintaining some existing structure.
    - Typically done over multiple seasons to avoid excessive stress on the plant.

- **Common Uses:** Overgrown hedges, old fruit trees, and ornamental shrubs.

2. Rejuvenation Pruning

- **Definition:** A drastic form of pruning that cuts a plant down to near ground level or 1-2’ above ground level or to encourage growth from the base.
- **Key Features:**
    - Removes all or most old wood, leaving the plant to regrow from its root system or a few stubs.
    - Typically done in early spring before new growth begins.
    - Best suited for plants that respond well to heavy pruning, such as certain shrubs (e.g., hollies, forsythia).
- **Common Uses:** Reviving shrubs that have become woody, sparse, or unproductive.

N. Pollarding and Coppicing

- **Pollarding**
    - Pollarding is a planned system that removes new shoots back to established pollard heads on a regular cycle. Topping an established crape myrtle is a different practice. It makes large wounds and can produce weakly attached shoots. For routine maintenance, make selective cuts that keep the tree’s natural structure.
    - Common in ornamental or urban settings to keep trees at a manageable size.
- **Coppicing**
    - Cutting trees/shrubs close to ground level to encourage multiple stems.
    - Historically used for sustainable wood production; works well with certain species like willow or hazel.
- **Maintenance**
    - Must be done regularly to maintain form and avoid weak attachments.
    - If ignored, pollarded or coppiced plants can grow out of control and become structurally unsound.

Conclusion

Pruning can dramatically improve a plant’s health, aesthetics, and productivity. By following safety guidelines, using the “4 D’s” approach, understanding different types of cuts, and timing your pruning to encourage optimal growth or blooms, you will set our customers’ plants on a path to thrive. Whether you are making simple heading cuts on shrubs or performing a full rejuvenation pruning on an older plant, a thoughtful approach will result in healthy, attractive plants for years to come.

#4 – Pruning Equipment – The Right Tool for the Right Job

Using the proper tool is critical for both efficiency and safety. The right tool choice can mean quicker, cleaner cuts, less effort, and reduced risk of injury to both you and the plant. When tools are maintained correctly, they last longer, perform better, and minimize the spread of disease among plants. This module will outline various cutting and pruning tools, explain their ideal uses, and emphasize safe handling and care techniques.

For all tools in is important to oil before each job, **keep out of rain**, clean after use, and sharpen at least weekly.

A. Manual Bypass Hand Pruners

- **Best For:** Very small to small stems that need quick, precise cuts.
- **Advantages:**
    - Lightweight and easy to maneuver
    - Faster cutting action than power pruners
    - Produces clean cuts that help plants heal faster

B. Small Power Bypass Hand Pruners

- **Best For:** Slightly larger stems and deeper cuts, especially in early-season pruning.
- **Advantages:**
    - Provides more cutting power than manual pruners
    - Reduces hand fatigue on multiple cuts
    - Ideal for stems too thick for standard hand pruners

C. Large Power Bypass Hand Pruners

- **Best For:** Medium-sized branches (up to 1–1½ inches). Useful for:
    - Cleaning up low tree branches in lawn areas
    - Heavy pruning to reduce plant size
- **Advantages:**
    - High cutting capacity with minimal effort
    - Excellent for tackling bigger pruning jobs quickly

D. Manual Hedge Shears

- **Best For:**
    - Early-season shaping and size reduction on small-stemmed plants
    - Maintaining shapes on shrubs with small leaves
    - Light pruning on most shrubs throughout the year
- **Advantages:**
    - Quick trimming over broad areas
    - Ideal for creating neat, uniform hedges

E. Handheld Battery-Powered Chainsaw or Manual Hand Saw

- **Best For:**
    - Cutting larger branches
    - Rejuvenation or renovation pruning
- **Advantages (Battery Chainsaw):** Quick, high-powered cuts with less physical exertion.
- **Advantages (Manual Hand Saw):** More control, lighter weight, and no need for charging.
- **Maintenance Tip:**
    - For chainsaws, keep the chain sharp and oil reservoir filled.
    - For manual saws, clean after each use to prevent rust and store in a dry place.

F. Light, Long-Pole Manual Bypass Pruners

- **Best For:**
    - Light pruning tasks
    - Reaching thin, high-up branches without a ladder
- **Advantages:**
    - Lightweight, reducing arm fatigue
    - Good for small to moderate pruning without extra power sources

G. Long-Pole Battery-Powered Bypass Pruners

- **Best For:** Branches within the tool's rated capacity that you can reach and cut safely from stable footing.
- **Advantages:**
    - Powerful cutting action with extended reach
    - Minimizes the need for ladders in many cases
- **Note:** These can be heavy. If branches are thin, opt for lighter manual tools to reduce strain.

H. Long-Pole Battery-Powered Chainsaw

- **Best For:**
    - Cuts within the tool's rated capacity that a trained operator can make safely from the ground.
    - Rarely used in everyday pruning tasks
- **Important Safety Note:**
    - A pole tool extends your reach from the ground. Its reach and cutting capacity are only part of the decision. Follow the manufacturer's instructions, keep people clear of the drop area, and refer high or heavy limbs to a qualified arborist.

I. Importance of Tool Selection and Maintenance

1. **Efficiency –** The right tool helps you work faster and with less effort, yielding better-quality results.

2. **Safety –** Mismatching tools to tasks can lead to accidents. Proper reach, sharp blades, and well-maintained equipment reduce risks.
3. **Tool Longevity –** Clean, sharpen, and oil tools to prevent corrosion and unnecessary wear, prolonging their service life.
4. **Plant Health –** Sharp, clean blades make smoother cuts that heal more quickly and reduce the chance of disease.

Conclusion

Selecting the proper pruning tool not only boosts productivity and safety but also maintains the overall health of our customers' landscapes. By keeping tools clean, sharp, and well-lubricated, you ensure they stay reliable and ready for any pruning task throughout the season.

#5 – Pruning for a Beautiful Yard

When pruning for the landscape as a whole, think like a designer—treat each plant as part of a broader composition rather than as a standalone element. Here are a few key concepts to keep in mind:

A. Layering and Proportion

- **Front-to-back scaling**: If you have three rows of plants near the house, ensure the front row is the smallest and the back row is the largest. This helps create depth and prevents taller shrubs from hiding smaller ones behind them.
- **Visual balance**: If a row of identical plants or two matching plantings flank a doorway or walkway, prune them so they match in size and shape. This symmetry can bring a sense of order and harmony to the landscape.
- **Appropriate plant heights**: If a plant is intended to screen or frame a window, leave it tall enough to serve that function. Conversely, if a plant is beginning to block a view (like a porch railing or a window), prune it to maintain an open sightline. We often want to allow a plant right in front of a window to grow tall enough to be seen through the bottom of the window. For example, when a landscape may not have much interesting views during the middle of the winter being able to see the blooms of a camellia can brighten the view.

B. Unity Through Repetition

- **Consistent form**: Where possible, prune similar plants to a similar shape or density. This prevents one plant from appearing drastically different from its neighbors, promoting visual unity. This is a big problem when taking over the pruning of a landscape that has been sheared a lot: the same types of plants have been sheared to different sizes.
- **Strategic variety**: Even within a unified design, you may have specimen plants or ornamental features that stand out. Use pruning to highlight these "focal points" while keeping surrounding plantings cohesive. For example, a Japanese maple is surrounded by 7 azaleas. You want to make sure the azaleas are pruned low enough so the Japanese maple stands out.

C. Rhythm and Flow

- **Reinforce paths**: Along walkways, prune plants to guide the eye toward the main entrance or focal area. By gently rounding or softening the plants along a path, you create a visual "flow" that invites movement through the space.
- **Transition zones**: If you have multiple plant groupings—like a flower bed that transitions to a hedge, then to a taller tree—prune so that each grouping appears to flow into the next. This rhythm carries the eye smoothly across the landscape.

D. Emphasis and Focal Points

- **Highlight special features**: If you have a specimen tree or a unique ornamental shrub, prune neighboring plants to avoid competing for attention. Keep surrounding foliage slightly lower or more open so the focal point can stand out. See azalea example above.
- **Create sightlines**: Prune selectively to frame views of architectural elements (like a front door, window, or garden sculpture) or natural features (like a pond or distant view).

E. Seasonal and Future Growth Considerations

- **Think ahead**: Before you reduce plants to a uniform height or shape, consider how quickly they grow. A hedge pruned tightly in spring may look perfect at first but could outgrow the design by midsummer.

- **Maintain continuity**: Some plants grow quickly, while others remain relatively static. Schedule pruning to keep the overall design consistent throughout the season.

F. Harmony with the Home or Building

- **Proportion to the facade**: Prune so plant heights or shapes complement the house's architecture, rather than hiding key features (windows, porch details) or dwarfing them.
- **Views from inside**: Consider how plants look from inside the home. Sometimes you'll want to prune to open up a view, other times you'll want to let plants fill a window for privacy or for enjoyment of the foliage or flowers from inside.

Conclusion

When you step back and treat the landscape like a cohesive composition, pruning becomes more than just a chore—it becomes a tool for shaping, balancing, and elevating the design. By applying these concepts, you'll ensure that every cut supports the bigger picture and that you truly "see the forest," not just the individual trees.

#6 – Pruning Perennials and Evergreen Herbaceous Plants

A. Seasonal Timing Basics

- **Late Winter to Early Spring**: Ideal for many perennials and some ground covers. Pruning during dormancy can reduce stress and allow plants to direct energy into fresh growth.
- **After Flowering**: Suitable for plants that bloom early in the season; prune once blooms fade to maintain shape and encourage potential reblooming (where applicable).
- **Late Fall**: Light cleanup and removing spent annuals, though many perennials can be left partially intact to protect plant crowns from winter damage.

B. Plant Specific Guidelines

Carex – This grass like plant doesn't have to be cut back in spring if it looks okay. They are more sensitive to being cut back than true grasses and other grass like plants such as liriope and mondo. If the leaves are brown and/or ratty cut approximately 40-50% following the natural mounded shape.

Cast Iron Plant – Evergreen so you don't have to cut down completely unless the plant has significant cold damage (it will come back). Prune in late winter or early spring before new growth starts. Remove old, damaged, or diseased foliage at the base. If it is more than 50% of the leaves need removal and it is close to when the growth will come out go ahead and cut down all leaves to 2-3".

Coral Bells – Coral bells often keep some foliage through winter. In spring, remove dead or damaged leaves, taking care to protect the crown and any new growth. Leave healthy foliage in place.

Daylily – Prune in late fall (preferably) or early spring by cutting foliage back to about 2" above the ground. Remove spent blooms during the flowering season to encourage more blooms and prevent seed formation.

Dianthus – Deadhead regularly during the blooming season to promote more flowers. If in really rough shape can cut back in late fall, otherwise wait until later winter to early spring. Cut back foliage to about 2" above the ground.

Farfugium (Giant Leopard Plant) – Evergreen so you don't have to cut down completely unless the plant has significant cold damage (it will come back). Prune in late winter or early spring before new growth starts. Remove old, damaged, or diseased foliage at the base. If it is more than 50% of the leaves need removal and it is close to when the growth will come out go ahead and cut down all leaves to 2-3".

Fern – Most ferns you'll encounter are evergreen so DON'T cut them down completely. Prune in late winter to early spring, just before new growth begins. Remove old or damaged fronds at the base. Avoid cutting into the crown or new growth. If the whole plant has cold damage they can be pruned to 3-5" from the ground and new fronds will grow out in spring.

Hosta – Trim after the first hard freeze in fall. Cut back all leaves to the ground, leaving 1-2" of stem.

Iris – Cut back foliage to about 3" tall in late fall. Remove any diseased or yellow leaves throughout the growing season.

Lavender – New growth is sensitive and does not react well to winter cold. Wait to cut back until after the last hard frost, or when you see new growth starting in the spring.

Lenten Rose – Evergreen so don't cut down completely unless the plant has significant cold damage (it will come back). Prune in late winter or early spring before new growth starts. Remove old, damaged, or diseased foliage at the base. Deadhead spent flowers to prevent self-seeding and redirect energy to new growth.

Peony – Prune in late fall or early spring by cutting foliage back to about 2" above the ground. It is important in zones 7b and higher that the crown on peonies is exposed during the winter to encourage abundant blooming in the spring.

Phlox – For tall species, prune in late autumn or early spring before new growth appears. For creeping species, prune after flowering in early summer.

Rosemary – Prune lightly in spring after new growth begins. **Avoid cutting into old wood as it will likely not regenerate.** You can also lightly trim throughout the growing season to maintain shape and tell customers is okay to take small pieces off for cooking anytime.

Russian Sage – New growth is sensitive and does not react well to winter cold. Wait to cut back until after the last hard frost, or when you see new growth starting in the spring.

Sage (regular, culinary) – Prune lightly in spring after new growth begins. **Avoid cutting into old wood as it will likely not regenerate.** You can also lightly trim throughout the growing season to maintain shape and tell customers is okay to take small pieces off for cooking anytime.

Salvia – Prune in late winter or early spring before new growth begins. Cut back stems by about one-third to one-half of their length to promote denser growth.

Sedum – In early spring, cut back dead foliage to the ground. For tall varieties, you can pinch back growth in late spring to early summer to promote bushier growth and prevent flopping.

Shasta Daisy – Deadhead throughout the growing season to encourage more blooms. In fall, cut back stems to 2” from the ground after foliage has yellowed.

Thyme – Prune in early spring before new growth starts. Light pruning can be done throughout the growing season to maintain shape and promote bushiness.

Verbena – For perennial varieties, prune in early spring to remove damaged or dead plant parts. Periodic trimming during summer can encourage new growth and flowers.

#7 – Pruning Ornamental Grasses and Grass-Like Plants (e.g., Liriope and Acorus)

Overview

Pruning ornamental grasses and grass-like plants is essential for maintaining their health, appearance, and vigor. Proper pruning helps control size, promotes fresh growth, and reduces the risk of disease. This guide covers the best practices for pruning different types of ornamental grasses, including timing, methods, and specific considerations.

Types of Ornamental Grasses and Grass-Like Plants

Ornamental grasses can be categorized into two main types:

1. **Cool-Season Grasses**
    - Examples: Festuca (Fescues), Calamagrostis (Feather Reed Grass)
    - Growth pattern: Begin growing in early spring and may remain semi-evergreen.
    - Pruning timing: Late winter to early spring, just before new growth appears.
2. **Warm-Season Grasses (most grasses you'll encounter)**
    - Examples: Muhly, Miscanthus, Panicum (Switchgrass), Pennisetum (Fountain Grass)
    - Growth pattern: Start growing in late spring and go dormant in winter.
    - Pruning timing: Late winter to early spring, just before new growth appears.

Grass-like plants such as **Liriope** (Monkey Grass) and **Acorus** (Sweet Flag) typically require pruning in late winter or early spring to remove old, damaged foliage, and make way for fresh growth.

Key Considerations for Pruning

- **Late Winter/Early Spring:** Most ornamental grasses and grass-like plants should be pruned during this time. Avoid pruning too late, as cutting into fresh growth can damage the plant.
- **Fall and Winter:** For most dormant ornamental grasses, leave the old foliage through winter and cut it back in late winter or early spring, before new shoots emerge. Leave enough stubble to protect the crown, adjusting the height for the species and any new growth. For evergreen grasses, remove damaged foliage as needed and leave healthy growth in place.

Pruning Methods

1. Steps for Pruning Large Clumps

1. **Bundle the Blades:** Gather the dry blades and tie them into a bundle before cutting. Keep everyone's hands clear while you cut, then lift away the tied bundle for cleanup.
2. **Cut at the Right Height:** Use pruners or manual shears to cut the bundle 4-6" above the ground.

2. Steps for Grass-Like Plants (e.g., Liriope, Acorus)

- Use pruners to trim foliage down to 2-4" above the crown.
- Shearing and raking up debris may work best.

Tips for Success

- **Protect New Growth:** Always prune before new growth begins to avoid cutting into fresh shoots.

- **Leave Some Stubble:** Leave enough stubble to protect the crown, adjusting the height for the species and any new growth.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Pruning Too Early or Late:** Cutting back too early can leave the plant vulnerable to winter damage, while pruning too late can damage new growth.
- **Cutting Too Low:** Avoid cutting grasses too close to the ground, as this can damage the crown and delay regrowth.
- **Neglecting Cleanup:** Leaving old foliage around the base of the plant can harbor pests and diseases.

Conclusion

Pruning ornamental grasses and grass-like plants is a straightforward task that greatly enhances their appearance and health. By understanding the specific needs of each type of grass, using the right tools, and pruning at the appropriate time, you can keep your landscape looking its best year-round.

#8 – Pruning Techniques and Terms

Understanding pruning terms is essential for employees because it ensures you can properly care for plants, trees, and shrubs, maintaining their health, beauty, and safety. This knowledge enhances professionalism, improves customer satisfaction, and reduces the risk of costly mistakes. In short, mastering these terms equips employees to deliver high-quality, expert services that reflect Proper Pruning's commitment to excellence.

There are two sections below: the first has most of the important terms *not covered above* grouped where appropriate in paragraph form and the second just has a list of all the terms, definition, and tips you should know.

Foundational Pruning Concepts

Pruning is the selective removal of plant parts for growth control, health, and appearance. It starts with **Formative Pruning** in young trees, focusing on developing a strong structure. **Apical Dominance** refers to the control exerted by the apical bud (the bud at the tip of a stem) over the growth of lateral buds below it. When you prune off the tip of a stem (apical bud), you temporarily disrupt apical dominance. This stimulates the growth of lateral buds below the cut, resulting in bushier growth (see heading cuts). **Bud Pruning** and **Pinching** involve removing or reducing buds to direct growth, while **Disbudding** is used for shape control or increasing bloom size in plants like roses or peonies.

Structural Pruning Techniques for Trees

Structural Pruning enhances long-term tree health and form. **Scaffold Pruning** establishes primary branches around a central leader, while **Subordination Cuts** reduce competing leaders. **Crown Cleaning** removes dead or weak limbs, and **Crown Thinning** selectively removes branches for better light and air circulation. **Crown Reduction** decreases overall size without harmful **Topping** (cutting off the top of tree), which should be avoided. **Vase Pruning** creates an open center in fruit trees for improved light penetration.

Branch Management and Specialized Cuts

The branch collar is the swollen area where a branch joins a trunk or larger branch. When removing a branch entirely, cut just outside the collar. **Heading Back** shortens branches to a bud or smaller branch, while **Lateral Pruning** (or thinning) cuts back to a side branch at least one-third the diameter of the removed portion. **Limb Lopping** is just taking off larger limbs. **Drop Crotch Pruning** can reduce tree size by cutting leaders back to lateral branches. **Avoid flush cuts that damage the collar and avoid leaving a long stub.**

Aesthetic and Specialized Pruning

Topiary Pruning creates artistic shapes, requiring regular attention. **Espalier** trains trees or shrubs to grow flat against a support, usually against a wall. **Vista Pruning** enhances views while maintaining tree health. **Standard Pruning** creates a tree-like shape in shrubs or vines by selecting a single stem and removing lower growth.

Seasonal and Situational Pruning

Winter Pruning promotes vigorous spring growth in many plants (we normally wait until after hard freezes or late winter to avoid potential plant damage). Some are prone to **Bleeding**, or sap flow, when cut in spring. **Frost Pruning** is cutting foliage damaged by freezing temperatures. If it is early or mid-winter it is best to wait until after last hard freeze to make substantial cuts, but clipping off small amounts of damaged foliage earlier is usually okay. Be careful not to prune into the plant too early as this removes some natural insulation. **Green Pruning** removes young, non-woody growth during the growing season. **Dormant Bud Pruning** stimulates growth in specific directions by removing growth to activate dormant buds.

Pruning for Plant Health and Safety

Maintenance Pruning involves regular removal of dead, diseased, or crossing branches. **Snagging** focuses on removing dangerous or broken branches. **Palm Pruning** should only remove completely brown fronds of palm trees. **Surgical Pruning** is just precise pruning. So, the pruning you do on a Japanese maple, for example, might be considered surgical pruning if you're very careful in what you're doing, taking time to look for crossing branches, thinking about the structure and future growth, cutting just above nodes, etc. **Root Pruning** can be used for growth control or transplant preparation. **Utility pruning is specialized work to maintain clearance from utility lines. Stay clear of branches near power lines and contact the utility.**

Specialized Pruning Techniques

Tip Bearing Pruning is crucial for trees that bear fruit at branch tips. Avoid cutting back the tips of last year's growth. A whorl refers to a circular arrangement of branches that grow from the same point along the trunk. So **Whorl Pruning** is removing competing branches to promote a strong central leader (main trunk). It is useful in pines and conifers for shaping and density control. **Mist Pruning** involves light, frequent pruning of soft, herbaceous growth. **Canopy Lifting** and **Crown Raising** remove lower branches to increase clearance. **Cross-Pollard Pruning** is a variant of pollarding used on multiple branches. **Deadheading** removes spent flowers to encourage more blooms.

Advanced Pruning Concepts for Trees

Included bark can weaken the union where two stems meet. On a young tree, reducing a competing stem can help guide its structure. On a mature tree or where large limbs are involved, ask a qualified arborist to assess the union. Girdling, the accidental removal of a ring of bark, should be avoided. **Lion's Tail Pruning**, which removes side branches leaving foliage only at the end, leads to weak structure and should be avoided. **Notching** stimulates growth with a small cut above a bud. **Undercutting** is the initial cut on the underside of a branch for the 3-step process of removing a heavy branch and prevents bark tearing when removing large branches. **Wound Dressing** is avoided in modern practice as most plants can seal their own wounds.

Specialized Pruning Approaches

Natural Pruning involves minimal intervention; just problematic branches are removed. **Nibbling Pruning** makes small cuts for gradual shaping. **Selective Pruning** and **Selective Removal** choose specific branches for desired effects. **Skirt Pruning** removes lower branches to prevent ground contact. **Training Pruning** directs growth from a young age. **Transitional Pruning** adjusts methods as a plant matures. **Zone Pruning** applies different approaches to top, middle, and lower plant zones.

Apical Dominance – Tendency of the apical bud to inhibit lateral bud growth. Pruning the apical bud can encourage lateral growth.
Bark Inclusion – Included bark can weaken the union where two stems meet. On a young tree, reducing a competing stem can help guide its structure. On a mature tree or where large limbs are involved, ask a qualified arborist to assess the union.
Bleeding – Flow of sap from a cut, especially in spring. Generally, bleeding does not harm most trees and most shrubs won't have much bleeding. For plants that do bleed badly, prune when the plant is less likely to bleed.
Branch Collar – Swollen area where a branch joins a trunk or larger branch. When removing the branch entirely, cut just outside the collar.
Bud Pruning – Removing or reducing buds to direct growth. Pinch or cut off unwanted buds.
Canopy Lifting – Removing lower branches to raise canopy height. Gradually remove lower branches.
Coppicing – Coppicing means cutting a tree or shrub close to the ground so it sends up new stems. Confirm that the species tolerates this treatment before attempting it.
Cross-Pollard Pruning – Variant of pollarding used on multiple branches. Prune several main branches back to pollards for regrowth.
Crown Cleaning – Removing dead, diseased, or weak limbs from a tree or shrub canopy. Identify and remove problematic branches.

Crown Raising – Crown raising means gradually removing selected lower branches for clearance. How much to remove depends on the tree's age, health, and structure.
Crown Reduction – Decreasing tree height/spread. Remove outer branch portions; avoid topping.
Crown Restoration – Pruning to restore a tree's shape. Usually requires multiple prunings over years.
Crown Thinning – Selective branch removal for light and air. Remove branches evenly throughout the crown.
Deadheading – Removing spent flowers to encourage more blooms. Snip off faded blooms at their base.
Disbudding – Removing buds for shape control or bloom size. Common in roses or peonies.
Dormant Bud Pruning – Removing growth to encourage dormant bud activation. Stimulates growth in specific directions.
Drop Crotch Pruning – Reducing tree size by pruning back leaders to lateral branches. Often used as a better alternative to tree topping.
Espalier – Training a tree or shrub to grow flat against a support, such as a wall with trellis. Prune and tie branches to a frame for desired shape.
Flush Cut – A pruning cut made close to the trunk or main limb. Avoid flush cuts; leave the branch collar intact.
Formative Pruning – Early pruning to shape young trees or shrubs. Focus on developing a strong structure.
Frill Pruning – Removing a ring of bark from around a tree to kill it. Not recommended; harmful to the tree.
Frost Pruning – Pruning due to frost damage. Wait until after the last frost to prune.
Girdling – Accidental removal of a ring of bark. Avoid making cuts that encircle a branch or trunk.
Green Pruning – Removing young, non-woody growth. Shapes plants and controls size during the growing season.
Hard Pruning – A substantial cutback to reduce size or renew growth. Reserve it for healthy, established shrubs of species known to recover from it.
Heading Back – Shortening a branch back to a bud or smaller branch. Cut above a healthy bud or lateral branch.
Heading Cut – Removing the terminal portion of a branch. Make the cut above a bud facing the growth direction.
Hedge Pruning – Maintaining or creating a formal hedge shape. Trim regularly, and if shearing, make sure to occasionally use bypass pruners to cut deep into the hedge to provide light and air inside.
Lateral Pruning – Cutting back to a lateral branch of at least one-third the diameter of the branch being removed. Maintains structure and balance.
Limb Lopping – Limb lopping means removing a large branch. Refer heavy or hazardous limbs to a qualified arborist.
Lion's Tail Pruning – Removing side branches from a main branch, leaving foliage at the end. Avoid; leads to weak branch structure.
Maintenance Pruning – Regular pruning for plant health and appearance. Remove dead, diseased, or crossing branches annually.
Mist Pruning – Light, frequent pruning of soft, herbaceous plants. Encourages denser, controlled growth.
Natural Pruning – Minimal intervention growth. Minimal pruning, just problematic branch removal.
Nibbling Pruning – Making small cuts for gradual shaping. Useful for detailed shaping without stressing the plant.
Notching – A small cut above a bud to stimulate growth. Make a shallow cut above a dormant bud.
Palm Pruning – Removing old fronds from palms. Only remove completely brown fronds.
Pinching – Removing growing tips of young plants with fingers. Encourages bushier growth; common in herbaceous plants.
Pole Pruner – Tool for cutting higher branches. Use with care, ideally with training or experience.
Pollarding – Pollarding is a planned system that removes new shoots back to established pollard heads on a regular cycle. Topping an established crape myrtle is a different practice. It makes large wounds and can produce weakly attached shoots. For routine maintenance, make selective cuts that keep the tree's natural structure.
Pruning – Selective removal of plant parts for growth control, health, and appearance. Match the cut to its purpose. Shorten a twig just above a healthy bud and remove a whole branch just outside its collar.
Reduction Cut – Pruning cut reducing branch length to a smaller lateral branch. Ensure lateral branch is at least one-third the diameter of the branch being removed.
Regenerative Pruning – Pruning to help old or overgrown trees. Gradual renewal pruning is best.
Rejuvenation Pruning – Cutting plants almost to ground level. Suitable for shrubs that handle severe pruning, including many broadleaf evergreens such as hollies and ligustrum.
Remontant – Plants that produce blooms on old and new wood, allowing them to bloom multiple times in a growing season. This is a huge advantage for macrophylla (traditional, "big leaf") hydrangeas. Two types that we encounter are Penny Mac and those in the Endless Summer series.
Renewal Pruning – Gradual removal of old wood over years. Each year, remove up to a third of the oldest stems or

branches.
Retrenchment Pruning – Gradual size reduction in older trees. Mimics the natural aging process of trees.
Root Pruning – Cutting roots for growth control or transplanting. Cut larger roots cleanly.
Scaffold Pruning – Developing primary branches around a central leader. Essential for strong structure in young trees.
Selective Pruning – Choosing specific branches for a desired effect. Assess structure and prune to enhance natural shape.
Selective Removal – Pruning specific branches for shaping and structure. Choose branches impacting shape or health.
Shaping – Pruning for a particular shape or design. Regular shaping needed for formal designs.
Shearing – Trimming plants into shapes using hedge trimmers. Allow for wider growth at the base for formal hedges and occasionally use bypass pruners to cut deep into the hedge to provide light and air inside.
Skirt Pruning – Removing lower branches to prevent ground contact. Ideal for fruit trees for better air circulation.
Snagging – Removing dangerous, dead, or broken branches. Often done for safety; requires prompt attention.
Standard Pruning – Creating a tree-like shape in a shrub or vine. Involves selecting a single stem and removing lower growth.
Structural Pruning – Enhancing long-term tree structure and health. Identify and correct structural issues early.
Stump Pruning – Cutting a tree down to a stump. (Also see coppicing.) Some trees can regrow from stumps.
Subordination Cut – Reducing a competing leader or branch. Maintains a single, dominant trunk in young trees.
Suckering – Removing shoots from roots or lower trunk. Remove suckers as close to their base as possible.
Surgical Pruning – Precise pruning for health or aesthetics. Requires expertise.
Thinning – Removing entire branches to improve light and air circulation. Remove older, less productive branches at their origin.
Tip Bearing Pruning – Pruning fruit trees that bear fruit at tips. Avoid cutting back the tips of last year's growth.
Tip Pruning – Trimming branch tips for bushier growth. Common in hedge maintenance.
Topiary – Shaping plants into decorative forms. Regular pruning and detailed shaping required.
Topiary Pruning – Creating and maintaining artistic shapes. Requires regular pruning and vision. If using shears, occasionally use bypass pruners to cut deep into the hedge to provide light and air inside.
Topping – Cutting off the top of a tree. Avoid topping; leads to weak growth and stress.
Training Pruning – Directing growth through pruning. Start when the plant is young.
Transitional Pruning – Adjusting pruning method as a plant matures. Shift from formative to maintenance pruning.
Undercutting – Initial cut on the underside of a branch. Prevents bark tearing down the trunk.
Utility Pruning – Utility pruning is specialized work to maintain clearance from utility lines. Stay clear of branches near power lines and contact the utility.
Vase Pruning – Creating a vase-like shape in fruit trees. Remove central branches for light.
Vista Pruning – Pruning to enhance a view from a point. Remove branches to clear sightlines while maintaining tree health.
Water Sprouts – Removing weak, fast-growing shoots on branches. Remove most water sprouts unless needed for branch replacement.
Whorl Pruning – Removing growth at nodes where several branches originate. Useful in pines and conifers for shaping and density control.
Winter Pruning – Pruning during the dormant season, typically late winter. Promotes vigorous spring growth in many trees and shrubs.
Wound Dressing – Covering cuts with a substance to protect them. Often avoided in modern practice as most trees and shrubs can seal their own wounds.
Young Tree Pruning – Structural pruning in the early years of a tree. Establishes a strong framework for future growth.
Zone Pruning – Pruning according to different plant zones. Each zone (top, middle, lower) may need a different approach.