

## PRUNING FLOWERING WOODY SHRUBS

"Rejuvenation" pruning in late winter/early spring is the best method for many flowering woody shrubs. (For more information see CSU Extension "Colorado Master Gardener" series #619)

### Spirea

**Spring:** (blooms in August in GVM). Cut back the tips of most spirea varieties immediately following the first flush of spring flowers. Trim the stem tips back to the topmost leaf bud on each stem, using clean shears. Maintain the shape of the shrub as you prune. Tip pruning removes the dead blossoms and may encourage new flower bud formation.

**Summer Overgrowth:** Prune overgrown shoots and stems and dead or diseased branches at any time during the summer growing season to maintain the shrub's shape. Make the cuts within 1/4 inch of a leaf or bud when possible. Cutting an overgrown stem slightly shorter than the surrounding stems helps camouflage the cut edge.

**Fall Prune:** Trim back overgrown shoots or those that produced sparse foliage on the lower stems severely in fall after the foliage begins to fall off, to keep the shrubs shaped and compact. Cut back each stem to within 8 to 12 inches of the ground. In spring, a severely pruned spirea grows new stems that are all capable of flowering.

**Apache Plume**—Prune twice a year. In the late winter, when it is dormant, cut off any broken or diseased stems. Make each cut one quarter inch above a growth node or bud. Prune no more than one third of the plant, taking the older stems first.

**Woods' Rose**—Prune woods' rose in the spring while the plant is dormant. Pruning may also be done in the summer, after woods' rose has finished blooming, if you cannot remember which canes are old growth and which are new growth. Prune woods' rose annually. Remove any dead or damaged branches. Remove them as close to the base of the woods' rose as you can get.

Remove any suckers. Woods' rose will send off a plethora of them, and unless you want the shrub to grow out of control, prune them back to the base of the plant.

Trim back old growth carefully. Trim back the old growth to the shape you wish the plant to keep. **Do not remove the old growth. Woods' Rose flowers on old growth.** It needs the old canes in which to thrive and attract wildlife. Woods' rose will flower several times during the spring and summer.

Remove about 20 to 25 percent of growth from your woods' rose each time you prune it. Leave about 3 to 4 inches between each cane so the sunlight may get into the bush.

Cover each pruning cut with pruning seal in order to prevent cane bores.

**Boulder Raspberry**— Prune or thin out one-third of older stems in late winter or early spring to encourage more growth and better flowering from base of shrub. Thinning is more easily done with leafless branches in early spring before growth starts but can also be done in summer. This method is time-consuming and doesn't work well on twiggy, multi-stem shrubs (spirea)

**Lilac**—Pruning on a regular basis keeps lilacs from getting too tall and unmanageable. Cutting back the tops of overgrown stems is oftentimes not enough. It is generally better to cut the entire stem. Trimming lilacs is best accomplished using clippers. Remove spent blooms all the way to the stems to prevent seeding and encourage more blooms later on. Cut back about a third of the branches. Cut away shoots growing near the ground that may be sprouting from the main trunk. In order to improve air circulation or to allow more light to filter through, trimming lilacs within the inner branches may be necessary. If lilac bushes are already too large or becoming unsightly, however, pruning the entire bush or tree to about six or eight inches off the ground may be necessary. Keep in mind that you may have to wait for flowers, as it takes about three years for them to develop once entire shrub has been cut.

The best time for pruning lilac bushes is right after their flowering has ceased. This allows new shoots plenty of time to develop the next season of blooms. Pruning lilacs too late can kill young developing buds. If you are pruning lilac trees or shrubs entirely to within inches of the ground, it is best to do so in early spring. New shoots will develop during the regular growing season as long as there are a few healthy shoots left. Once the growing season has ended, remove any unsightly shoots.

**Spanish Broom**—The best method to prune Spanish Broom (and Russian Sage) is "rejuvenation" pruning in which some or all of the old, large stems are removed near the ground level. This should be done before growth begins in the spring. The plant will respond by producing new stems from the base instead of the broom at the end of a pruned branch. The newer branches tend to flower more heavily than the older stems, so this increases flower production by the plant in addition to reducing its size.

If stems are cut back only partially, the shrub will often produce a cluster of new branches near the end of the stem that was pruned. It forms a broom-like growth at the end of this stem. This broom growth often dies back after a few years. Rejuvenation pruning is a better way to prune these and other shrubs that respond in the same manner.

**Russian Sage**—If pruning in March or April, remove all of last year's growth leaving about 6-8 inches of stem above the ground. This will rejuvenate the plant since new growth comes from the crown. Pruning methods can be alternated each year if preferred. Spring and summer care consists mainly of pruning. When new spring growth emerges, cut each old stem back to just above the lowest set of leaves. If the plant begins to spread open or sprawl in late spring or summer, shear off the top one-third of the stems to encourage upright growth.

**Potentilla**—Prune in early spring before shrub leaves out. Remove 50-75% of the top of the shrub maintaining a mounded form. Remove the heaviest canes all the way to the ground. Some summer touch up after the shrub blooms to reshape and remove spent flowers, will improve the look of the plant while stimulating additional flower growth.

**Currant**—In very early spring, use rejuvenation to cut shrub down to ground level. Thinning rather than rejuvenation could be done by cutting one-third of the oldest wood down to the ground but this method is time-consuming and doesn't work well on twiggy, multi-stem shrubs (spirea). Does currant meet this description?? Might consult a nursery professional.

**Catmint**—Cut back in early spring. Even without being sheared, the plant will repeat bloom and continue to look attractive over the hot summer months. Leave spent foliage in place over winter to help protect the crown. To keep catmint vigorous, divide it every three to four years in either spring or early fall.

**Lead Plant**—Use rejuvenation method to cut the plant back to the ground every couple of years to make it fuller and help restrain its tendency to be a bit gawky.

**Rabbitbrush**—Cut the plant back to about one foot in the early spring to help maintain the plant's natural globe shape and to keep the plant dense.