

PRUNING TREES & SHRUBS

How to Prune Specific Plants

This final publication in the “Pruning Trees & Shrubs” series gives tips for pruning specific plants.

The plants listed in Tables 4.1 through 4.8 (pp. 2 – 5) are some of the most commonly used shrubs, trees, subshrubs, and vines of the Southeast. We have listed them alphabetically within the group that best describes their primary characteristics. The tables include each plant’s function in the landscape, tips on what type of pruning the plant can tolerate, and the best time to prune in the Southeast. In addition, we have included bloom times for flowering plants and indicated each plant’s primary feature. To learn more about pruning, including techniques and tools, see the other publications in the “Pruning Trees & Shrubs” series:

Before the Cut (AG-780-01)
Tools to Make the Cut (AG-780-02)
General Pruning Techniques (AG-780-03)

This series is a revision of a previous publication:
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Important Terms (Know these before making the first cut!)

Here are some basic terms you must know before picking up the pruning tools.

crown thinning—Removing crowded growth from the crown of a tree or shrub to allow more light in and promote healthy growth.

deadheading—Removing spent flowers from a plant to make it tidier, promote continued bloom production, or prevent fruit and seed production.

espalier—A plant trained through pruning to grow in a formal two-dimensional form.

heading cut—A pruning cut that removes only a portion of a stem, often at an intermodal area (a cut made between two buds or nodes).



pinching—Nipping out the tip of a growing shoot with your fingers,

rejuvenation (renovation) —Revitalizing a plant, often through rejuvenative pruning back to nearly ground level; can be accomplished in one year or over several years depending on the species.

shearing—Tip pruning without selecting individual laterals or buds (topiary or hedge maintenance).

thinning cut—Removing branches at the branch collar, typically done to open the canopy to air movement and increase light penetration.

tip pruning—Pinching out or cutting back the growing tip of a shoot either to encourage sideshoots or to remove damaged growth.

topiary—The practice of pruning a shrub or tree to create a shape or living sculpture; typically accomplished with shearing or heading back cuts.

watersprout—A vigorous vertical shoot growing from a branch.

xylem—Wood cells that move water and dissolved nutrients through the plant.

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Table 4.1. Deciduous Shrubs

Function: H – Hedge, Sc – Screen, S – Specimen, Sb – Shrub border, W – Wildlife, T – Topiary, E – Espalier, Ed – Edible, Rg – Rain gardens, G – Ground cover, F – Foundation planting (main part of landscape)

Primary Feature and Timing: In – Inconspicuous, EW – Early winter, LW – Late winter, W – Winter, SP – Spring, S – Summer, F – Fall, NI – Not important

Pruning Time and Type: Th – Thinning, H – Heading, R – Rejuvenation, R3 – Rejuvenate over three or more years, Dh – Deadheading

| Species | Bloom Time | | Function | Primary Feature | | Pruning Time and Type | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------|-----------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| | Old Growth | New Growth | | Flower | Fruit | Spring | Summer | Fall | Winter |
| <i>Berberis thunbergii</i> , Japanese barberry | | √ | H, Sc, Sb, W | In | F | | | | Th, H, R |
| <i>Callicarpa</i> sp., beautyberry | | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, W, F | In | S–F–EW | R | | Th | R |
| <i>Calycanthus floridus</i> , Carolina allspice | √ | √ | S, Sb, F | SP–S | S–F–W | Th | Th | | |
| <i>Chaenomeles</i> sp., flowering quince | √ | | Sc, S, Sb, E, Ed, G | W–LW | S–F | Th, R3 | Th, R3 | | |
| <i>Clethra alnifolia</i> , summersweet clethra | | √ | Sc, S, Sb, Rg, F | S | F–EW | Th, H, Dh | | | Th, H, Dh |
| <i>Deutzia</i> sp., deutzia | √ | | Sc, S, Sb, F | S | NI | H, R | | | H, R |
| <i>Edgeworthia papyrifera</i> , edgeworthia | √ | | S, Sb | LW | In | Th | | | Th |
| <i>Ficus carica</i> , fig | √ | √ | S, E, Ed | In | S–F | Th, H | | | Th, H |
| <i>Forsythia ×intermedia</i> , forsythia | √ | | H, Sc, Sb | LW–SP | NI | | R, Th, H | | |
| <i>Hamamelis</i> sp., vernal witchhazel | √ | | Sc, S, Sb, F | LW–SP | S–F | Th | Th | | |
| <i>Hibiscus syriacus</i> , rose-of–Sharon | | √ | H, Sc, S, E, F | S–F | F–W | Th, R | H | | Th, R |
| <i>Hydrangea arborescens</i> , smooth hydrangea | | √ | S, Sb, F | S | NI | Th, H, R | Dh | | Th, R |
| <i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i> , bigleaf hydrangea | √ | √ | S, Sb, F | SP–S | NI | H, Dh | Dh | | |
| <i>Hydrangea paniculata</i> , panicle hydrangea | | √ | S, Sb, F | S | NI | Th, H, R | Dh | | Th, R |
| <i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i> , oakleaf hydrangea | √ | | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | SP–S | NI | Th, Dh | Th, Dh | | |
| <i>Ilex verticillata</i> , winterberry holly | | √ | Sc, S, Sb, Rg, W, F | In | F–W–SP | Th | | | Th |
| <i>Itea virginica</i> , itea or sweetspire | √ | | S, Sb, Rg, F | SP–S | S–F | Th, R | Th, R | | |
| <i>Jasminum nudiflorum</i> , winter jasmine | √ | | Sc, Sb, F | W–LW | NI | Th, H, R | | | |
| <i>Kerria japonica</i> , Japanese kerria | √ | | H, Sc, Sb, F | SP | NI | Th, R | | | |
| <i>Lagerstroemia indica</i> , crape myrtle | | √ | Sc, S, Sb, F | S | S–F | Th, H | | Dh | Th, H, Dh |
| <i>Lonicera</i> sp., shrub honeysuckle | √ | √ | H, Sc, S, W, F | SP–S | S–F | Th, R | | | Th, R |
| <i>Loropetalum chinense</i> , loropetalum | √ | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | SP, F | NI | Th, H | Th, H | | Th, H |
| <i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i> , ninebark | √ | | Sc, S, Sb, W, F | SP–S | S–F | Th, R | | | |
| <i>Rosa</i> sp., landscape roses | | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, W, G, F | SP–F | F–W | R | H, Dh | H, Dh, R | R |
| <i>Spiraea ×bumalda</i> , Bumald spirea | √ | √ | Sc, S, Sb, F | S–F | NI | Th, H, R | Dh | Dh | Th, H, R |
| <i>Spiraea ×vanhouttei</i> , Vanhoutte spirea | √ | | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | SP | NI | Th, H, R | | | |
| <i>Viburnum dentatum</i> , arrowwood viburnum | | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, W, F | SP–S | S–F | | | | Th, R |
| <i>Viburnum macrocephalum</i> , Chinese snowballbush viburnum | √ | √ | Sc, S, Sb, F | SP–F | NI | Th, R | | | |
| <i>Viburnum plicatum</i> , doublefile viburnum | | √ | Sc, S, Sb, F | S | NI | | | | |
| <i>Vitex agnus–castus</i> , chaste tree | | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | S | F | | | | H, R |

Table 4.2. Broadleaved Evergreen Shrubs

Function: H – Hedge, Sc – Screen, S – Specimen, SB – Shrub border, W – Wildlife, T – Topiary, E – Espalier, Ed – Edible, Rg – Rain gardens, G – Ground cover, F – Foundation planting (main part of landscape)

Primary Feature: In – Inconspicuous, EW – Early winter, LW – Late winter, W – Winter, SP – Spring, S – Summer, F – Fall, NI – Not important

Pruning Time and Type: Th – Thinning, H – Heading, R – Rejuvenation, R3 – Rejuvenate over three or more years, Dh – Deadheading

| Species | Bloom Time | | Function | Primary Feature | | Pruning Time and Type | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-------|-----------------------|------------------|--------|-----------|
| | Old Growth | New Growth | | Flower | Fruit | Spring | Summer | Fall | Winter |
| <i>Abelia</i> × <i>grandiflora</i> , abelia | √ | √ | H, Sc, Sb, F | S–F | In | R | Th, R | | |
| <i>Aucuba japonica</i> , aucuba | | √ | H, Sc, Sb, F | In | F | Th | R3 | | |
| <i>Berberis julifanae</i> , wintergreen barberry | √ | | H, Sc, Sb, W, F | LW–SP | S | Th, H | | | |
| <i>Buxus</i> sp., boxwood | NI | | H, Sc, Sb, T, F | In | In | Th, H, R | H | H | R |
| <i>Camellia japonica</i> , Japanese camellia | √ | | H, Sc, S, Sb, E, W, F | EW–SP | In | Th, H, R3 | | | |
| <i>Camellia sasanqua</i> , Sasanqua camellia | √ | | H, Sc, S, Sb, E, W, F | F–EW | In | Th, H, R3 | | | |
| <i>Elaeagnus</i> sp., elaeagnus | √ | | H, Sc, Sb, E, W, F | In | S–F | | Th, H | Th, H | |
| <i>Fatsia japonica</i> , fatsia | | √ | S, Sb, F | F | F–EW | Th, H, R3 | | | |
| <i>Gardenia jasminoides</i> , gardenia | | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | S | S–F | Th, H, R3 | | | Th, H, R3 |
| <i>Ilex</i> sp., holly | | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, W, F | SP–S | F–W | Th, R | H | | Th, R |
| <i>Kalmia latifolia</i> , mountain laurel | √ | | S, Sb, F | SP | NI | Th, R3 | Dh | | |
| <i>Ligustrum</i> sp., privet | | √ | H, Sc, Sb, T, E, F | SP–S | F–W | Th, R | H | H | Th, R |
| <i>Mahonia</i> sp., mahonia | √ | | Sc, S, Sb, F | EW–SP | Sp–S | R3 | | | |
| <i>Myrica cerifera</i> , wax myrtle | √ | | H, Sc, S, Sb, W, F | SP | S–W | Th, H | H | | |
| <i>Nandina domestica</i> , nandina or heavenly bamboo | | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | S | F–W | Th, H, R3 | | | |
| <i>Nerium oleander</i> , oleander | | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | SP–S | F | | Th | Th, R3 | |
| <i>Osmanthus</i> sp., osmanthus | | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | F–W | In | Th, H | Th, H | | |
| <i>Pieris japonica</i> , Japanese pieris | √ | | Sc, S, Sb, F | SP | In | Th | Dh | | |
| <i>Pittosporum</i> sp., pittosporum | √ | | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | SP | F | Th, H | Th, H | | |
| <i>Pyracantha</i> sp., pyracantha | √ | | H, Sc, S, Sb, E, W, F | SP | F–W | Th | Th, H | | |
| <i>Rhododendron catawbiense</i> , Catawba rhododendron | √ | | H, Sc, Sb, S, F, W | SP–S | NI | Th, H, R3 | H, Dh | | |
| <i>Rhododendron</i> sp., azaleas | √ | √ | H, Sc, S, Sb, F | SP | NI | Th, H, R, R3 | Th, H, R, R3, Dh | | |
| <i>Sarcococca</i> sp., sarcococa | NI | | H, S, Sb, F | NI | NI | Th, R | Th | | |
| <i>Viburnum</i> sp., evergreen or semi-evergreen viburnum | √ | | H, Sc, S, Sb, W, F | SP–S | S–EW | Th | Th | | |

Table 4.3. Needled Evergreen Shrubs

Function: H – Hedge, Sc – Screen, S – Specimen, SB – Shrub border, W – Wildlife, T – Topiary, E – Espalier, Ed – Edible, Rg – Rain gardens, G – Ground cover, F – Foundation planting (main part of landscape)

| Species | Function | Primary Feature | | Pruning Time and Type | | | |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| | | Flower | Fruit | Spring | Summer | Fall | Winter |
| <i>Chamaecyparis</i> sp., false-cypress | Sc, S, Sb, W, F | Inconspicuous | Fall–Winter | Thinning, Heading | Heading | Thinning | Thinning |
| <i>Juniperus</i> sp., junipers | H, Sc, S, Sb, W, G, F | Inconspicuous | Fall–Winter | Thinning | Thinning | Thinning | Thinning |
| <i>Thuja</i> sp., arborvitae | H, Sc, S, Sb, W, F | Inconspicuous | Fall–Winter | Thinning | Thinning | Thinning | Thinning |

Table 4.4. Deciduous Trees

Function: Sh – Shade, S – Specimen, St – Street tree, W – Wildlife, E – Espalier, Ed – Edible, Rg – Rain gardens

| Species | Function | Primary Feature | | | Pruning Time | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------|---------------|------------|--------------|--------|------|--------|
| | | Flower | Fruit | Color | Spring | Summer | Fall | Winter |
| <i>Acer</i> sp., maples | Sh, S, St, W | Early Winter–Spring | Spring–Fall | Good | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Amelanchier</i> sp., serviceberry | S, St, W, Ed | Spring | Summer | Good | | √ | | |
| <i>Betula nigra</i> , river birch | Sh, S, St, W, Rg | Spring–Summer | Inconspicuous | Good–Fair | √ | √ | √ | |
| <i>Carya illinoensis</i> , pecan | Sh, S, W, Ed | Inconspicuous | Fall | Good–Fair | √ | | √ | √ |
| <i>Cercis</i> sp., redbud | S, St, W, Ed | Spring | Summer–Fall | Good | √ | √ | | |
| <i>Chionanthus</i> sp., fringetree | S | Spring | Summer–Fall | Fair | √ | √ | | |
| <i>Cornus</i> sp., dogwood | S, W, Ed | Spring, Summer | Fall–Winter | Good | √ | √ | | |
| <i>Diospyros virginiana</i> , persimmon | S, Sh, W, Ed | Inconspicuous | Fall–Winter | Fair | | | | √ |
| <i>Ginkgo biloba</i> , ginkgo | S, Sh, St, Ed | Inconspicuous | Fall | Good | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Halesia carolina</i> , Carolina silverbell | S | Spring–Summer | Fall | Fair | | √ | | |
| <i>Koelreuteria paniculata</i> , goldenrain tree | Sh, S, St | Summer | Summer–Fall | Fair–Bland | √ | | | √ |
| <i>Liquidambar styraciflua</i> , sweetgum | Sh, St | Inconspicuous | Fall–Winter | Good | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i> , tulip tree | Sh, St | Spring–Summer | Fall–Winter | Good | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Magnolia</i> sp., flowering magnolia | Sh, S, Rg | Spring, Summer, Fall | Summer–Fall | Bland | | √ | | |
| <i>Malus</i> sp., crabapple | S, W, E, Ed | Spring–Summer | Fall–Winter | Fair–Bland | √ | | | |
| <i>Prunus</i> sp., flowering cherry | S, Sh, W | Spring, Summer, Fall | Fall–Winter | Good–Fair | √ | √ | | |
| <i>Pyrus calleryana</i> , Callery pear | S, Sh, W | Spring | Fall–Winter | Good | √ | √ | | √ |
| <i>Quercus</i> sp., oak | S, Sh, St, W, Ed | Inconspicuous | Fall–Winter | Good–Bland | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Styrax japonicus</i> , Japanese snowbell tree | S | Spring | Fall | Fair | √ | √ | | |
| <i>Taxodium distichum</i> , bald cypress | S, Sh, St, Rg | Inconspicuous | Fall | Good | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Ulmus parvifolia</i> , Lacebark or Chinese elm | S, Sh, St | Inconspicuous | Summer–Fall | Good | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Zelkova serrata</i> , Japanese zelkova | S, Sh, St | Inconspicuous | Summer–Fall | Good | √ | √ | √ | √ |

Table 4.5. Needled Evergreen Trees (The primary feature of these plants is their needle–like foliage.)

Function: Sh – Shade, S – Specimen, W – Wildlife, H – Hedge, Sc – Screen, E – Espalier, and Rg – Rain garden

| Species | Function | Primary Feature | Pruning Time | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------|--------|------|--------|
| | | | Spring | Summer | Fall | Winter |
| × <i>Cuprocyparis leylandii</i> , Leyland cypress | H, W, Sc | Year-round form and color | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Cedrus deodara</i> , deodar cedar | Sh, S | Year-round form and color; interesting cones | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Cupressus arizonica</i> , Arizona cypress | Sh, W, Sc | Year-round form and color; interesting cones | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Juniperus</i> sp., juniper | S, W, H, Sc | Year-round form and color | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Pinus</i> sp., pine | Sh, S, W | Year-round form and color, interesting cones | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Thuja</i> sp., arborvitae | S, W, H, Sc | Year-round form and color | √ | √ | √ | √ |
| <i>Tsuga</i> sp., hemlock | S, W, H, Sc | Year-round form and color; interesting cones | √ | √ | √ | √ |

Table 4.6. Broadleaved Evergreen Trees (These trees produce broad evergreen leaves that provide year–round interest in the landscape. They also have showy flowers and/or fruits in late spring or summer.)

Function: Sh – Shade, S – Specimen, St – Street tree, W – Wildlife, E – Espalier, Ed – Edible, Rg – Rain gardens

| Species | Function | Primary feature | | | Pruning Time | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------|-------|--------------|--------|------|--------|
| | | Flower | Fruit | Color | Spring | Summer | Fall | Winter |
| <i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> , southern magnolia | Sh, Sc, E | Spring–Summer | Summer–Fall | Good | | √ | | |
| <i>Magnolia virginiana</i> , sweetbay magnolia | Sc, Rg | Spring–Summer | Summer–Fall | Fair | | √ | | |
| <i>Photinia</i> sp., photinia | H, S, Sc | Spring–Summer | Summer–Fall | Good | | √ | | √ |
| <i>Ternstroemia gymnanthera</i> , Japanese ternstroemia or clevera | H, S, Sc | Inconspicuous | Summer–Fall | Good | √ | √ | √ | √ |

Table 4.7. Subshrubs. Woody older growth gives rise to herbaceous growth each year.**Pruning Time and Type:** R – Rejuvenate, H – Head back to new growth, T – Tip back old flowers or growth, Th – Thinning, and DH – Deadheading

| Species | Primary Feature | | Pruning Time and Type | | |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------|--------|-------|
| | Flower | Fruit | Spring | Summer | Fall |
| <i>Buddleia davidii</i> , butterflybush | Summer–Fall | Not important | R | DH | DH |
| <i>Caryopteris clandonensis</i> , blue mist spirea | Summer–Fall | Not important | H | DH | |
| <i>Lavendula angustifolia</i> , lavender | Spring–Summer | Not important | T | DH | T, DH |
| <i>Perovskia atriplicifolia</i> , Russian sage | Summer–Fall | Not important | H | H | |
| <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i> , rosemary | Fall–Spring | Not important | T, Th | Th | |

Table 4.8. Vines**Pruning Time and Type:** R – Rejuvenate, H – Head back to new growth, T – Tip back old flowers or growth, Th – Thinning, and DH – Deadheading

| Species | Primary Feature | | Pruning Time and Type | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------|--------|------|
| | Flower | Fruit | Spring | Summer | Fall |
| <i>Bignonia capreolata</i> , cross vine | Spring–Summer | Inconspicuous | H | H | |
| <i>Clematis</i> × <i>jackmanii</i> , Jackman clematis | Spring | Inconspicuous | R | | R |
| <i>Clematis terniflora</i> , sweetautumn clematis | Summer–Fall | Inconspicuous | R | T | R |
| <i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i> , Carolina jessamine | Spring, Fall | Inconspicuous | T | T | |
| <i>Hydrangea anomala</i> subsp. <i>petiolaris</i> , climbing hydrangea | Spring–Summer | Inconspicuous | Th, H | Th, H | |
| <i>Jasminum officinale</i> , common white jasmine | Spring–Summer | Inconspicuous | R (one-third) | T | |
| <i>Trachelospermum jasminoides</i> , Confederate jasmine | Spring–Summer | Inconspicuous | T | | |
| <i>Wisteria</i> sp., wisteria | Spring | Fall | | H | |



wisteria



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