

P.R.U.N.E.

The YouTube videos I've adapted here for our purposes can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iNfSaH5fLUM>

P - Prepare your plant. The first step in any pruning situation is to remove wild branches that are trying to escape the boundaries of reason, and possibly swallow up the gardener as they do so. It's a good chance to show your plant who's boss by taking the whole structure down by 1/3. Makes it much easier to see what's going on in the center of the plant and allows you to begin to imagine how this monster might look if it had some manners.

R – Remove dead, diseased, and crossing branches. Remove all dead branches at their base (Horticulturist Lee Reich even recommends snapping off fully dead branches by hand as this is a more “natural” way for deadwood to be removed and plants recover well from it. It also allows your hands to be the judge of whether the branch is dead or just dormant, in which case it will bend and not snap. You'll want to avoid leaving dangerous jagged ends, though). Also remove branches that are crossing into the center of the plant. If two branches are rubbing, you'll have to make one of those life-and-death decision about which branch is younger, healthier, or going in the direction you want it to grow.

U – Understand your plant. First, the basics: Is it a shrub, tree, or grass? Is it Evergreen (green leaves (or needles) remain all year round), Deciduous (drops its leaves for a winter rest, but then buds out again on those same woody branches), or Herbaceous (top growth dies back to the ground leaving a root system that will send up new shoots when winter rest is complete). Does it flower and, if so, on this year's growth (new wood) or last year's growth (old wood), or both? If you like those flowers, DON'T PRUNE plants that bloom on old wood in Spring. You won't kill the plant, but you'll cut off the (almost invisible) flower buds waiting for the right time to pop out. EVERGREEN shrubs are best pruned now, late February-March, before budding out new growth. Those who are too rambunctious for you can be trimmed again in June-July, but don't prune them in Fall when new growth might be affected by a sudden freeze. HERBACEOUS perennials (such as Anemone, Aster, Verbena, Cardinal Flower, Lyre-Leaf Sage and others) should be cut to the ground BEFORE they begin sending up new growth to avoid damage to this year's greenery. GRASSES should be cut down to a few inches BEFORE new growth in late winter, early spring.

N – Nothing Left Behind. This is a very important, yet often underused step. Diseases, funguses, critters, and other ne'er-do-wells LOVE it when you leave a nice pile of mouldering leaf and sticks on the ground. It only takes a few minutes to rake out a clean patch under your favorite rose bush (and apply clean compost and mulch in its place). Just do it!

E – Enjoy Your Plants. The step that makes it all worthwhile. Our gardens, with all their imperfections, weeds (and we-be's...thanks Becky Jordi) are joyous places where life rolls on and on! **HAPPY GARDENING!**