

Proper Pruning Precepts

Steve Fazio

Shrubs used in landscaping the home grounds have distinct natural shapes which lend a pleasing effect to the over-all landscape design of the home grounds. This desirable feature is often destroyed when the plants are allowed to grow beyond their intended space allotment and attempts are made to reduce their size by pruning.

Pruning should not be used to correct mistakes made in selecting a shrub for a given location. A vigorous, tall-growing shrub should never be planted in a location requiring a dwarf-type growth, with the intention of pruning it back to control height and width. This method of maintenance will produce a plant with many exposed, woody branches, or it may cause a gradual decline and possible death of the plant.

Should Be Continuous

Use of corrective pruning—pruning to maintain shape and size—can be practiced at any time of the year. It should be a continuous and gradual process, to prevent removal of an excess amount of growth, which could result in sunburning of the inner branches or production of an excessive amount of new branches. Gradual pruning will also prevent noticeable open spaces in the plant after the removal of branches. One should never allow plants to grow beyond a reasonable size before pruning.

The natural shape of shrubs is destroyed by incorrect pruning. This can be observed in many home plantings where the shrubs have a box-like shape. This condition happens when a shrub is allowed to grow unpruned for a number of years and, more specifically, when it grows beyond the height of a window sill. All branches

growing above this point are then pruned off evenly, eventually giving the plants a hedge-like appearance. The sides of the plant are pruned in a similar manner, changing the natural shape to the square look which is not desirable in an informal type of landscaping.

Doing It the Right Way

The natural shape of shrubs can be maintained by reducing the length of vigorous side and top branches as they develop on the plant. The pruning cut for the removal of these branches should always be made on the inside of the shrub to allow for development of the new branches below this cut.

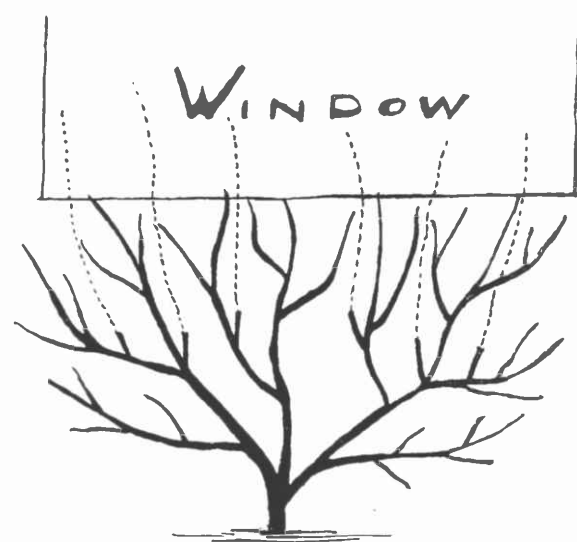
If a vigorous branch—one growing beyond the height of a window sill—is cut even with the sill, many branches will be stimulated to develop at that point. The branches developing on the inside of the shrub will provide for greater density, and also permit the removal of the larger woody branches which will be replaced by new growth.

First Pick Proper Plant

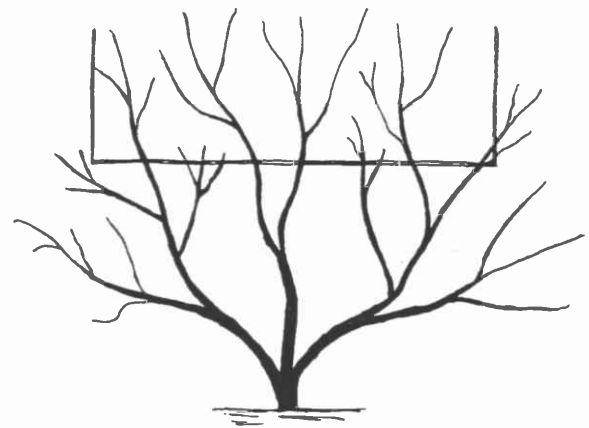
It must be borne in mind that corrective pruning cannot be depended upon to maintain low height of vigorous plants. When selecting a plant for any given location, make sure that you know its entire background as to vigor, width, height and ability to withstand pruning.

Nature has vested plants with certain definite characteristics. We can either assist nature by good pruning practices, or we can defy these inherited characteristics with disappointing results.

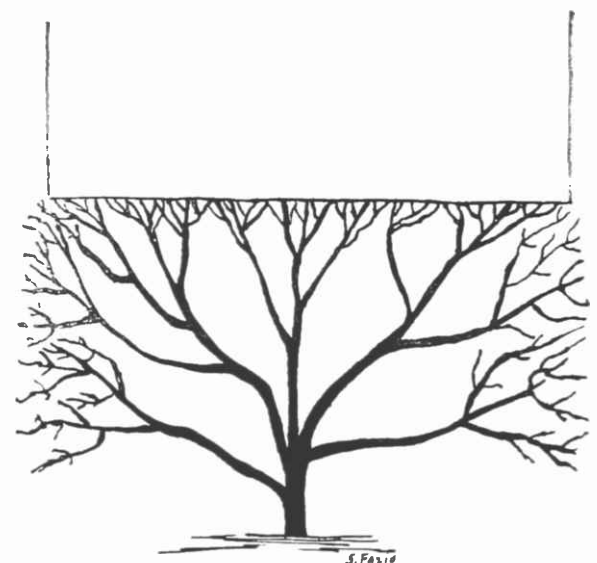
One of the most popular teachers on campus, the author is acting head of the Department of Horticulture.



THE RIGHT WAY—Dotted line represents branches which were cut back on the inside of the shrub. Height and shape are maintained.



SHRUB ABOVE WAS allowed to grow too tall before pruning. Cutting back the branches growing above the window sill will leave many open spaces.



CUTS FOR REMOVAL of branches were made even with the window sill. Note the location of new branches on top and sides. (All sketches by the author).