Pruning Ornamental Shrubs
Reasons for Pruning

Have one!
Reasons for Pruning:

1. Remove dead or diseased wood
2. Eliminate structural problems (e.g. crossing branches)
3. Eliminate hazards (e.g. pedestrian conflicts)
4. Improve flower display
5. Increase light levels in interior
6. Reduce plant size
7. Aesthetics (shaping)
Major considerations:

1. **HOW** does the shrub grow? (i.e. is it a suckering type shrub or does it grow more with a single trunk)
2. **WHEN** does the shrub flower? (i.e. does it flower on new growth or on old wood)
Deciding on how to prune based on: Shrub Habit versus
Suckering Shrubs
(rejuvenate from the ground)
Suckering type Shrubs

(plant rejuvenates readily from the ground)

Lilacs  
Mockorange  
Forsythia  
Redtwig dogwood  
Bigleaf hydrangea  
Japanese Kerria  
Spirea  

Deutzia  
Flowering quince  
Potentilla  
Itea  
Honeysuckle  
Privet, Amur  
Sumac
Suckering shrubs respond well to renewal pruning. Renewal pruning rejuvenates the plant and typically results in better flowering and fruiting.
Renewal pruning involves removing the largest branches or canes to the ground.
Do not leave stubs, and, generally don’t remove more than 1/3 of ‘canes’ at any one time.
Renewal pruning

Before

After
Shrubs that lend themselves to selective thinning. With these shrubs growth depends less on suckers or rhizomes.

Viburnums
Dogwood, flowering
Rose-of-Sharon/Althea
Witchhazel
Amelanchier

Azalea
Rhododendron
Magnolia
Butterflybush
Abelia
Selective thinning involves cutting back to a lateral branch or to the bud. Selective thinning can reduce the plant size while maintaining a natural habit.
Shearing

More formal, and, once you start, difficult to break-out of habit.
Shearing typically requires different tools.
STOP CRAPE MYRTLE MUTILATION
S.C.A.M.M.
For Crapemyrtles:

1. When planting, select the size plant you want rather than trying to make a tree-type into a small shrub using radical pruning techniques.

2. When you prune, use selective thinning, or, remove entire branches/canes to the ground rather than heading back every year to the same (ugly) stubs.
For flowering shrubs, **WHEN** to prune typically depends on whether flower buds are formed on current season growth (‘new’ wood) or on growth from the previous season (‘old’ wood).
Plants that flower on ‘old’ wood (flower buds are formed in the late summer/fall, carried through the winter, and then flower in spring)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plants that flower on ‘old’ wood</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amelanchier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forsythia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redbud</td>
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<td>Flowering quince</td>
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<td>Honeysuckle, winter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Magnolia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mockorange</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fringetree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spirea (Bridalwreath &amp; Vanhoutte)</td>
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<td>Lilac</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hydrangea (Bigleaf &amp; Oakleaf)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Azalea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Viburnum</td>
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<td>Weigela</td>
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Prune AFTER flowering!
Plants that flower on ‘new’ wood (flower buds are formed on current season growth)
Plants that flower on ‘new’ wood

- Abelia
- Rose-of-Sharon
- Butterflybush
- Clethra
- Sumac
- Crapemyrtle
- Roses
- Spirea (summer flowering types)
- Vitex
- Hydrangea (Panicle or tree-type)

Prune BEFORE flowering!
(usually done during dormant season)
Hybrid Tea Roses

Cut back to 8-18” in early spring. Prefer cutting back to an outward facing bud.
Hybrid Tea Roses

Special cases

Inward pointing bud

Outward pointing bud

Outward pointing bud

Outward pointing bud
Special cases

Ornamental Grasses
Special cases

Ornamental Grasses

Remember that the growing point for grasses is near the ground and that once we are past winter and have enjoyed the grass foliage and seedheads, we can/should cut grasses back. In the case of large grasses like pampass and fountain grass we may only be able to cut back to 12-18”. 
In summary, for flowering shrubs, consider the way the plant grows and when it sets flower buds to help determine HOW and WHEN to prune.