Pruning Ornamental Shrubs
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? (does it have a main trunk or is it a cane producing plant with multiple trunks)

2. **WHEN** does the shrub flower? (does it bloom in the spring, summer or fall)
Fit the pruning shears to the job.
Prune based on shrub habit.
How does the plant grow?
Cane producing shrubs benefit from rejuvenation pruning
Cane Producing Shrubs

(plant rejuvenates readily from the ground)

Mockorange
Forsythia
Redtwig dogwood
Bigleaf hydrangea
Japanese Kerria
Spiraea

Deutzia
Flowering quince
Nandina
Itea
Abelia
Butterfly bush
Cane producing 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 at the ground line.
Do not leave stubs, and, generally don’t remove more than 1/3 of ‘canes’ at any one time.
Renewal pruning

Before

After

J. Robbins 2002 -12
Shrubs that lend themselves to selective thinning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Viburnums</th>
<th>Azalea</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleyera</td>
<td>Rhododendron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose-of-Sharon/Althea</td>
<td>Hollies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ligustrum</td>
<td>Japanese Maples</td>
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</tbody>
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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.
More formal, and, once you start, difficult to break-out of habit.
Shearing typically requires different tools.
Formal Pruning
Crape-murder
For Crape myrtles:

1. Choose the right plant for the right spot
   Great variability on plant size.
   Ground covers to trees.
2. Don’t try to make a tree-type into a small shrub using radical pruning techniques.
3. 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.
When to prune flowering shrubs:

- Spring bloomers set flowers on older wood
  *Normally set flower buds in late summer or early fall.*

- Summer bloomers usually bloom on the current seasons growth.
Plants that flower on ‘old’ wood
(flowers buds are formed in the late summer/fall, carried through the winter, and then flower in spring)

- forsythia
- Big leaf hydrangea
- Oakleaf hydrangea
- azalea
- Spring spiraea
- Flowering quince
Plants that flower on ‘old’ wood

Azalea
Forsythia
Redbud
Flowering quince
Honeysuckle, winter
Magnolia
Mockorange

Fringetree
Spiraea (Bridalwreath & Vanhoutte)
Lilac
Hydrangea (Bigleaf & Oakleaf)
Rhododendron
Viburnum
Weigela

Prune AFTER flowering!
Plants that flower on ‘new’ wood
(flowers buds are formed on current season growth)

Summer spiraea
Crape myrtle
Buddleia
Plants that flower on ‘new’ wood

Abelia
Rose-of-Sharon
Butterfly bush
Clethra
Sumac

Crape myrtle
Roses
Spiraea (summer flowering types)
Vitex
Hydrangea (Panicle or Smooth)

Prune BEFORE new growth begins!
(usually done in late February)
Exceptions to the Rule:
Hydrangea problems
Special cases

Hybrid Tea Roses

Cut back to 8-18” in early spring.
Prefer cutting back to an outward facing bud.
Special cases

Hybrid Tea Roses

Inward pointing bud

Outward pointing bud

Outward pointing bud
Climbing Roses
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”.
Prune only if you know why.
Correct problems while the plant is young.
No pruning paint needed!
Make nice clean cuts.
Visible collar

- Remove branch bent at edge of collar

A = First cut
B = Second cut
C = Third cut
Summary

- Know when flowering plants bloom to determine timing of pruning.
- Are they cane producing plants or not.
- Evergreen plants grown just for foliage can be shaped at any time.
  - Severe pruning should be done in the spring for faster recovery.
- Know rules for special cases.