

Maintaining SHRUBS

in your landscape



Montana presents a harsh environment for landscape plants. High soil pH, low humidity and precipitation, Chinook conditions and fluctuating winter temperatures can take their toll on even the hardiest plants. To maintain a beautiful landscape, it is very important to give your shrubs the proper care they need to thrive.



Landscaping &
Garden Center

Watering Shrubs

Examine the soil 4 to 8 inches deep to determine the need for water. If the soil feels dry or just slightly damp, water is needed. Water slowly allowing it to penetrate deeply and soak the entire root zone. A drip irrigation system is ideal for shrubs. If using a drip system, install 1-2 1gph emitters per shrub and run for 4-8 hours, once or twice a week. If you do use a sprinkler system or if you hand water, be sure to soak the root system thoroughly. Avoid short, frequent watering, as this encourages the development of shallow root systems, which are vulnerable to drought, heat stress, and freezing injury.

Watering newly planted shrubs - It is crucial that all newly planted shrubs are watered routinely and thoroughly. With our hot, dry, windy summers, we must not neglect new plantings. The frequency of watering, however, depends greatly upon soil type and current weather conditions.

- In sandy, well-drained soil, water deeply about every 2-3 days until plants are established (about 30 days), and every 5-7 days after that.
- Plants in heavier soil will require water less often. They will need a deep soaking about every 4-5 days until established (about 30 days) and every 7-10 days thereafter.
- Under hot and/or windy conditions, shrubs will require water more often. In cooler weather or periods of heavy rain, water less often.
- When watering shrubs located on a hillside, remember to water slowly and deeply. If you are not careful, water will run off before it has a chance to soak in.

Certain plants, until established, will require more water than others. Some that need more water than normal are: hydrangea, potentilla, arborvitae (cedar), roses, spirea, dogwood, and many perennials and other shrubs that were in smaller pots.

Do not **over water**, that is, water too often. Plants must breathe as well as drink and saturated soils do not contain enough oxygen. Remember, *“you can’t water your plants too much at one time, but you can water too often”*. Make sure your plants aren’t constantly flooded.

Early fall watering – Special care must be taken to make sure shrubs enter the winter completely dormant and yet have an ample supply of sub-surface water to get through the winter. To accomplish this, gradually withhold water in the fall (after mid Sept.). This slows growth and helps the plant become dormant. Continue this drying for 4 - 6 weeks.

Late fall watering – It is very important to water all plants heavily in the late fall – about the 1st of November – before the ground freezes. Add enough water to fill the entire root zone, and more, to capacity. This stored moisture will be available to the plant roots beneath the frozen layer of soil during the winter. This is especially true of evergreens or anything planted in late summer or fall.

Winter watering – If the winter is unusually warm, dry and windy, or if your plants are in an exposed, sunny location, it may be necessary to thoroughly water evergreens and newly planted shrubs once a month in the winter. This is especially true for evergreens due to the amount of water needles can use on a sunny winter day.

Fertilizing

Shrubs should not need to be fertilized the first year. Fertilizers can “burn” tender new roots or stimulate crown growth faster than the roots can supply water. Be sure your shrubs need fertilizer before you fertilize them. If a plant is healthy, showing no nutrient deficiencies, and making satisfactory growth, it probably does not need to be fertilized. To determine if your shrubs need fertilizing you should have your soil tested. You can also look for symptoms of nutrient deficiency such as yellowing, stunted growth or twisted, deformed foliage. The best time to fertilize established shrubs is in the fall after the leaves fall from deciduous plants but about 1 month before the ground freezes. The second best time to fertilize is in early spring after the danger of severe cold has passed, but before the buds begin to swell. Apply no fertilizer between late June and before the fall application time. There are several methods used to fertilize shrubs. **Ross Fertilizer Stakes** are a slow release fertilizer. They are hard stakes that are hammered into the ground around the drip line of the shrub. If fertilizing smaller shrubs, you may need to break the stakes into smaller pieces. These stakes can be used once a year. **Water soluble foliar fertilizers**, such as Miracle Gro or Peters, offer a quick but short-lived nutrient boost to your plants. Plants can be fertilized by this method every one or two weeks. **Broadcast fertilizers** are in a granular form and are spread around the drip line of a shrub and left to filter into the soil. **Ross Root Feeder**, uses a tool that attaches to a hose and the fertilizer is administered directly to the roots by a metal probe. This can be done twice a year, in the spring and fall. This is also a good tool for deep watering your shrubs in a drought situation.

Mulching

Adding mulch around the base of your plants is a very important part of plant care. Mulching improves the environment for the tree and shrub roots allowing better infiltration of water, holding soil moisture, limiting weed growth, and reducing injury from lawn mowers and weed trimmers. It is very important to add mulch to evergreen shrubs, especially arborvitae. Apply a 2 – 6" layer of bark, compost or decorative rock on the soil surface around your new plantings. We recommend using a layer of Tytar weed control fabric under decorative rock, this will reduce weed growth and prevents the rock from "sinking" into the ground. Due to decomposition, bark mulches may need to be replenished every couple of years.

Pruning

Why you should prune shrubs

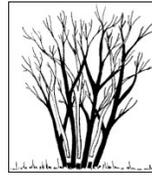
- To improve the health of a plant by removing dead, diseased, hazardous, or unsightly branches.
- To enhance flowering and fruiting by opening up a plant for better light penetration.
- To create a fuller look, reduce the size or maintain a special shape or form.

Deciduous Shrubs

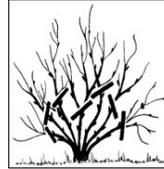
- Dead, dying and broken branches can be pruned anytime. Prune them to healthy tissue or to the ground. When removing infected wood, make the cut with a sterile blade into healthy wood well beyond the point of infection (6-12"). Sterilize pruning tools before each cut by dipping them into rubbing alcohol.
- The best time to prune most deciduous shrubs is early spring after severe cold has passed, but before new growth has begun (March).
- Shrubs that bloom in the spring on last year's growth should be pruned after flowering. Spring flowering shrubs are those that bloom with or before purple lilacs such as viburnums, honeysuckle, mockorange and forsythia. It will not harm the plant if you prune it before it flowers, you will just cut off that year's buds and you will miss out on the flowers.
- Prune in the heat of the summer cautiously, as it can weaken the plant.
- Do not prune in the late summer or early fall, (late August to early September). This will stimulate new growth which will be susceptible to frost damage and disease.

Pruning Deciduous shrubs

Thinning: This is a technique in which a few of the oldest stems are removed as near to the base of the shrub as possible or back to a main branch or trunk. No prominent stub remains. The result is fresh new growth, a better display of flowers and fruit, and improved air circulation, which helps to prevent disease.



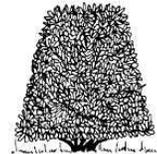
Heading: This is a technique in which shoots are cut back to a bud or lateral branch. Such a cut promotes more branching, resulting in a bushier shrub. Heading-back can also be done to keep a shrub at a fixed size. Commonly, 1/3 to 2/3 of each cane is removed. A combination of thinning and heading is an effective way to prune many shrubs.



Rejuvenation: For older shrubs, rejuvenation of the entire plant sometimes becomes necessary. Species such as mockorange, spirea, potentilla, lilac and dogwood respond well to cutting all stems back to four to eight inches from the ground. This is best done over 3 to 4 years. Removing 1/4 to 1/3 of the old stems each year.

Pruning Hedges

- A variety of deciduous or evergreen shrubs can be pruned into a formal or informal hedge.
- The formal hedge is sheared to a definite size and shape. This must be pruned regularly to look good, at least twice a year.
- The best time to prune hedges is the late dormant season before new growth starts. They may be sheared either before new growth starts or after they have completed spring growth in late June. Fast growing plants may be sheared several times a season.
- To develop a hedge that is well filled at the base, always trim so that the base is wider than the top. If the top is allowed to become wider than the base, the base will become thin and open.
- The informal hedge is often a row or grouping of shrubs planted close together but allowed to grow normally. It is usually pruned annually by thinning 1/4 to 1/3 of the oldest wood to the ground and heading back the branches to maintain a desired height and width.



Pruning Evergreen Shrubs

Pines and Spruces

- Pines and spruce are slow growing and usually don't need much pruning if planted in the right place that allows them to reach their mature size.
- Pines and spruces may be pruned in the spring (usually in June) when the new shoots, which look like candles, develop. When the "candle" has extended about to its full length, before the needles are fully developed, remove about 1/2 to 2/3 of the length of the "candle". This will reduce length and promote compactness.
- Do not prune back to the "woody" part of the stem leaving a stub. New growth will not emerge from this cut.



Junipers and Arborvitae

- More compact junipers result when long branches are pruned back to their junction at a lateral branch during early spring. Cuts should be made "back in" so that new growth will soon cover exposed stubs.
- Green foliage must remain on branches of junipers and arborvitae that are cut back. They can seldom develop new growth from bare stubs.
- Severe pruning should be done in early spring before new growth emerges. Light pruning or shearing may be done any time, as well as pruning broken or dead branches.
- Arborvitae and juniper develop a dead zone in the center of the plants. When pruning is done either on the tip or the sides, cuts should not be made into the dead zone. Overgrown plants can not be pruned back more than 20%.



This brochure is designed to give general guidelines for caring for shrubs. If you have any questions about specific plants, please feel free to give us a call. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.



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