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FIVE EASY STEPS FOR PRUNING A SHRUB

Step One:

- Before you make any cuts, it is important to develop a game plan or goal for your pruning. This can be as simple as knowing how you want the shrub to look when you are finished and some basic ideas as to how you might achieve that outcome.
- Walk around the shrub, assess how it looks, and think about its natural growth habit.
- What appears to be wrong (or right)? Is it too leggy? Too dense? Lopsided? Full of dead wood? Is it basically "okay" but needs some shaping?

Step Two:

- Start by pruning out all dead, diseased, or damaged branches or twigs. If tissues are diseased, make cuts at least several inches below visible symptoms and be certain to disinfest tools.

Step Three:

- Remove all crossing, rubbing, or misdirected branches and obvious water sprouts.

Step Four:

- Before doing any more pruning, walk around the shrub and note any differences in its appearance from your first assessment. Is additional pruning necessary to meet your goal or mental picture of the final outcome? Have you achieved your goal? Has your goal changed now that you've done some pruning? What else might need to be done?
- Approximately how much of the shrub have you already removed? (Remember: The rule of thumb for routine or maintenance pruning is to remove no more than 1/3rd of the branches at one time.)

Step Five:

- Most pruning mistakes are made by doing this step first!
- Final shaping of the shrub usually requires a combination of heading and thinning cuts. The approximate ratio of these cuts is determined by the condition of the shrub and the desired outcome. For example, if the shrub is too dense, most of the cuts would be thinning cuts; if the shrub is too thin, most of the cuts would be heading cuts.
- All final cuts should be made to enhance the natural form of the shrub.
- Your pruning efforts should produce a shrub that looks clean and is an asset to the landscape. A properly pruned shrub should not look "hacked" or "pruned."

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