

# PRUNING & SHAPING

WITH CHRIS CREED

CALU FACTSHEET

June 2011  
Ref: 020802



**Trees** Usually the public requires a standard or half standard tree.

This is the lollipop shaped tree we are used to. To produce a standard the whip or maiden needs to be cut at chin height, top shirt button was the norm. This will induce branching and around 5 flattish laterals can be selected nicely spaced around the tree. If the tree doesn't sell first year prune it again in autumn trying to keep the centre of the tree open. The best way of doing this is to imagine enough space in the centre to place a bucket.

Half standard is the same process but you start lower and here the belt buckle was the lowest branch.

In fruit some may want various espalier type shapes and these are produced by tying branches to canes to give the desired fan shape and may take up to 5 years to create.

Best time to prune is autumn as some trees will bleed if pruned in spring when the sap is rising. This applies to all except prunus that are best pruned in late spring.

Poorly shaped trees are best set about early on and don't be afraid to start them again. By this I mean cut back to where you want a branch. Also remove vertical branches even if it means taking out a lot of the tree as in a years time they will be the same poor branches but bigger.

Often ornamental trees are sold with branches all the way up the trunks, this can be detrimental to the effect say of white birches or snake barked maples.

**Shrubs** This is a little more complicated as shrubs can be pruned for shape and for marketing reasons. The rule of thumb is that early flowering shrubs are done after flowering so they have time to frame up and set flower bud for spring. Usually these flower buds are set in the autumn. In this group comes forsythia, weigelia, deutzia, camellia and mahonia. If these are cut hard back they often become vegetative and grow very quickly with long straight water shoots and these will not produce much flower so don't overdo it. This especially applies to protected crops where plants will grow laterals well over a metre before the flowers appear

Some plants like camellia and azalea are said to grow into money in that a large plant is worth more than a small, so these are pruned to tidy them up.

Plants that flower from now on (longest day) are often flowering on new wood grown since winter. Here are plants like Lavatera, buddleia, and roses.

If buddleias are cut back hard in early march in a container they will flower about now but will often be very large and straggly and keep blowing over so these are better cut a bit later or do some and some so the early pruned flower in May and the later flower in June and July so giving you more chance to sell. Roses tend to flower lower down if pruned hard in the "council" style so again do some and some so the hard pruned flower lower down and the lightly pruned higher up say if wanted for the back of a border or a climber for example. Hydrangeas are harder as if they have grown straggly in the previous season then any



Cronfa Amaethyddol Ewrop ar gyfer Datblygu  
Gwledig; Ewrop yn Buddsoddi  
mewn Ardaloedd Gwledig  
The European Agricultural Fund for  
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Centre for Alternative Land Use  
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pruning after the winter will reduce flower numbers so grow and shape these the previous year. This also applies to plants like pyracantha where flowers and subsequent berries will be pruned off, making them harder to sell. Prune these around August of the previous year so the new growth goes through shortening days and will initiate flowers. In hydrangea and many others of this kind cold in the winter helps stimulate flowering so

**Liners** These need to be pruned hard to get the bushy plants we need. These are best pruned with a hedge cutter so they are all the same height and the batches are even. If a hedge cutter isn't available (it does save a lot of time especially if fitted with a catching tray) say to the staff one fist or two etc.

Good shape begins here and is much harder to get later in the process.

**Herbaceous** Not easy as some of these are very tall, some of the sunflower types easily grow to 2m and these are back border plants but are hard to market as they look poor in pots and collapse when separated from their neighbours. Here you try and sell small, without flowers but this needs either knowledgeable buyers or a good label. Tall perennials are a feature of bigger borders so there is demand and shortening them mid season will result in less or no flowers so not an easy one.

This is an industry dilemma and there isn't really an answer. Even growth regulators will produce a shortened form that will not resemble the true plant as it will appear in future years.

Otherwise cut back to the ground or pot surface in Jan – Feb as the foliage can insulate the crowns in a hard winter.

**Evergreens** Conifers can be shaped in August the previous year, any later and winter damage may result from the unripe new growth. This is the best time for most evergreens but some will grow again. Any restricted forms like topiary are best done little and often to get the density of leaf.

**Hedging** These are best grown two dimensionally in that they are cut up the sides but allowed to get tall as most customers want a quick hedge. In fact you can now buy instant hedges in troughs that are just dropped into gardens and this is a growing trade. Yews and other conifers look much better if clipped like this as unpruned don't look right and the amateur finds it harder to begin to shape a hedge. Field grown deciduous hedges like quicks tend to be sold solely on height so less scope with these.

**Growth regulators.** These are chemical pruners and are a bit of a cheat but they will promote bushiness, flowering and reduce height but some experimentation may be needed. Main players are Cycocel, Bonzi, Dazide, and Regalis. These are used extensively in bedding plants but less so in trees and shrubs, mainly down to traditions. They can be very effective in climbers.

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