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Old Wood-New Wood Pruning Basics

1. If a plant blooms in the spring (February through June), it blooms on old wood. It sets up its buds the previous year. Prune right after blooming; you have a window of 4-6 weeks to prune the plant before the new buds are set.
2. If a plant blooms in the summer and fall, it blooms on new wood (current year's wood). Prune in the early spring; you have until late May/June to prune the plant. It is important that you do this, as you only get abundant flowers and fruit on the new wood. If you don't prune, the plant will get leggy and unproductive.
3. When you prune a stem, the hormones in the tip of the stem (apical dominance) move down the stem and cause the plant to branch. If you continue to only prune the tips of a plant, it will branch over and over; eventually you will create a dense canopy only on the outside of the plant. No light will penetrate the center and it will be bare. When you decide to reduce the height of the plant, you will not have any side branches to cut to.
4. The proper way to prune any shrub is to remove 1/3 of the oldest wood to the base and only THEN should you top the plant. This will encourage light to penetrate the center and new, young, productive wood will grow.
5. Of course, always remove any dead or diseased growth to keep the plant healthy.
6. Remove crossing branches; you are in charge of selecting which branches are in the right place and should remain.
7. Understand the natural habit of a plant. If a shrub is naturally open and vase shaped, place it in the landscape where it can grow to that form and prune it to maintain a graceful habit. If a plant has layering horizontal branches, remove the upright growing branches and select those growing sideways.
8. Some plants are die-back shrubs. That means that they often die completely to the ground in a cold winter and regrow a completely new plant each season. These bloom on current year's wood.

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