



Stephen & Kristin Pategas

in the garden *by Stephen and Kristin Pategas*

Shrub Rehab

Many shrubs grow to a point where they just don't fit in the garden anymore - physically and/or aesthetically. Often, they grow larger than anticipated, but fortunately, they can be rejuvenated with proper pruning. As our own garden matures we have pruned a number of shrubs to reduce them in size and improve their looks and blooming. Resist the urge to remove them and instead, read on...

The first step is to determine the potential mature height and width of the shrub. The odds are great it will grow larger than what you see in the nursery pot. Once you know what it is capable of, figure out the size you need the plant to be in the garden. Must it stay below a window sill or roof eave, or rise above the fence to screen a house next door? Also consider the width and whether it is too close to the house, driveway, walkways, or other plantings. Perhaps it's shading out plants underneath. Prune plants that bloom on new wood at any time.

Trim plants that flower on old wood within a few months of the blooming time and before they set new buds for the next year's flowering.

That's enough calculating, now the ground rules:

- Trim branches back a minimum of 12 to 18 inches beyond where you want the final height or width. This allows room for the plant to grow out with soft growth that is easier to trim.

- Trim some branches back even further almost to the center of the plant to allow light to enter and stimulate new interior growth.

- If the plant in question is much larger than what is desired, then heavy pruning is required. Remove up to one-third of the mature branches each year over three years. This method allows the plant to always look reasonably presentable. Or cut it all of the way back and watch it come roaring back.

- As plants grow out, make frequent cuts to shorten long branches. This encourages them to branch out and for the shrub to become full. Trim

away crossing or parallel branches.

- Make pruning cuts just above buds.

- Avoid shearing, which cuts away most flower buds and creates dense growth that shades the interior and shortens plant life.

- Do not perform "crape murder." Prune for structure while other cuts to shape are made on branches no thicker than a pencil.

- To reduce the chance of new growth being damaged by the cold, perform major pruning only from late February to late October.

- A bypass hand pruner, bypass lopper, and folding pruning saw will help make these tasks go smoothly. Keep your tools sharp and oiled and regularly disinfect them so diseases are not spread between plants.

Maintain shrubs at the size needed, but for lower maintenance select the right shrub for the space and it may require only minimal or no pruning.

All photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis.

Before And After



Beautyberry with partial rehab cut in March.



Same beautyberry one month later

Before And After



Major rehab in March on dwarf Walter's viburnum



Same dwarf Walter's viburnum one year later in bloom, but it was full after six months.