

Having proper tools is an essential requirement for good pruning. The many tools available today for the home gardener can vary considerably in quality and price. Choosing the correct one for the job makes the task easier and minimizes the chance of injury to the plant.

A small garden can be cared for using only a few basic tools while large garden maintenance may require additional specialized tools. The basic tools used by most gardeners are hand pruners and a pruning saw. If you are pruning a large property and have many plants you might also want hedge shears, loppers and a pole saw.



HAND TOOLS

KNIVES

A pruning knife is a sharp small folding knife with a forward curving blade, 3"-4" long. Used to remove small twigs and for nicking and notching.

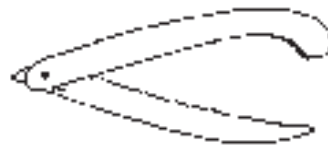
PRUNING SAWS

Available in rigid and folding models. Used for cutting larger branches that can not be handled by hand shearers or loppers. There are two blade types available, one with set teeth, like a carpenter's saw, the other with triangular filed teeth (Japanese type). Of the two, the Japanese type blade is recommended, because it makes a much smoother cut with less physical effort. Pruning saws cut faster and easier than a carpenter's saw. Saws with large teeth (5 to 6 per inch) are used only for heavy unconfined pruning (branches 2" - 4" in diameter). Saws with smaller teeth (up to 10 per inch) are more effective for cutting smaller branches (under 2" in diameter), dead wood and woody shrubs.

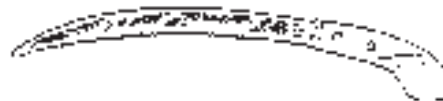
A. Pull-Cut Saws

Pull cut saws cut only on the pull stroke.

- ◆ Folding Saw-blades from 7 to 16 inches long. Used for rose, shrub and dormant season pruning.



- ◆ Curved Saw with rigid handle-blades 12 to 16 inches for larger branches.



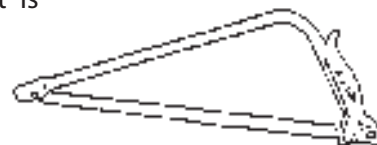
- ◆ Speed Saw with raker teeth-cuts fast and is good for green wood. The rakers (slots in place of every 5th tooth) pull sawdust out to prevent jamming.



- ◆ Speed Saw with lance teeth-cuts deadwood better than saw with raker teeth.

B. Push-Cut Saws

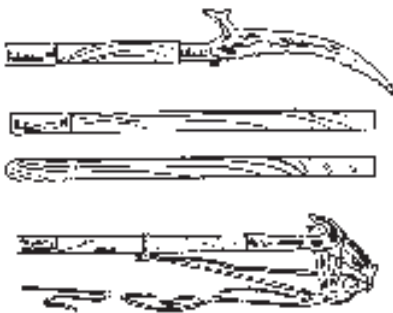
- ◆ Bow Saw-cuts on push and pull stroke. Use is limited as it is hard to use among crowded branches.



- ◆ Two-edged Saw-on one side has small teeth that cut on the push stroke; the other has coarse teeth that cut on both strokes. Limited use since it may be difficult to cut one branch without injuring another one close to it.

POLE PRUNERS AND SAWS

Give you extra reach for high branches. Most pole saws have blades that cut on the pull stroke. Poles can be wood, aluminum or fiberglass. Some telescope and others have extensions. Pole pruners (consisting of large bypass pruners) are sold with a combination saw and pruning hook operated by pulling a cord or chain. Pole pruners will cut branches up to 2" thick.



A saw blade is mounted in combination with the pole pruner or may be mounted on a pole by itself. The saw is designed to cut on the pull stroke and is used to remove branches up to 4" in diameter.

ONE-HAND PRUNERS

Most are designed for cutting stems up to 1/2 inch in diameter and come in two designs: bypass and anvil. Never "wobble" the pruner to make a cut as this will tear the branch tissue. If you can't make a clean cut, the branch is too large and a long-handled, heavy duty tool should be used.

- ◆ Bypass action-the cutting blade slides along a second, stationary blade. There is no bruising on the side of the stem next to the cutting blade. Good quality bypass pruners can be sharpened and have easily replaceable blades.



- ◆ Anvil action-the blade cuts against a flat anvil. This causes unavoidable crushing of the stems and can also result in an incomplete cut, tearing plant tissue.



Specialty shears are available for specific jobs: cutting flowers, cutting stems of fruit and Japanese-style bonsai shears that make a concave cut.

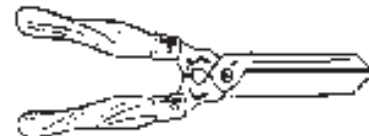
TWO-HAND LOPPERS

These have long handles from 15 to 35 inches and provide better leverage and more cutting power while extending your reach. They come in the same basic design as the one-hand pruners: anvil and bypass. Some have an adjustable cutting action and covered handle grips.



HEDGE SHEARS

These two handled, long bladed shears are used primarily for shearing plants into hedges or formal shapes such as topiary. The standard blade length is 8 inches while handle length varies from 10 to 22 inches long. Handle comfort and weight are important features. Good quality shears have shock absorbers for hand comfort and an adjustable tensioning screw between the blades.



POWER TOOLS

HEDGE TRIMMER

This is a power tool used only for trimming and will jam if used on hard woody twigs. They are available in gas or electric models. Electric models are either cordless or have a long cord.



CHAINSAWS

Chainsaws can inflict horrible injuries to the operator and their use for pruning in trees should be restricted to professional arborists.

SHREDDERS

Shredders can take branches up to 1 1/2" in diameter and reduce them to chips which can then be composted or aged to use as mulch. It is important to use eye protection when using a shredder.

References

- Department of Horticulture, The Ohio State University Extension Service, Bulletin 543. (out of print)
- Coombes, D. et al. The Complete Book of Pruning. Ward Lock publishers, 1994.
- Reich, Lee. The Pruning Book. Tauton Press, 1997.