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Prune, Don't Shear these Shrubs

By Lydia Holley

Do you have shrubs that grow from several canes emerging from near the ground? There are numerous types of shrubs which grow like this, some of which are: abelia, beautyberry (*Callicarpa*), flowering quince (*Chaenomeles*), forsythia, mock orange (*Philadelphus*), nandina, and early-spring blooming spireas (such as 'Snowmount' or 'Van Houtte'). If these shrubs are sheared off at the top, the growth underneath will remain bare, ruining their natural look.



Photo shows Abelia.

Gardeners prune for several reasons: to improve the look of their shrubs, to keep their shrubs at an acceptable height, and to increase the number of stems and leaves on the plant. Should you prune these shrubs that grow from multiple canes correctly, you will accomplish all three of those goals. The secret is in the pruning technique.

In order to keep these types of shrubs looking bushy while reducing their height, you should prune them from the bottom. Take the oldest canes and cut them close to the soil. You may also cut out any any dead or diseased canes, and canes that are undesired - bent, growing erratically, etc. Do not remove more than approximately one-third of the shrub. New canes will emerge and form a naturally formed shrub full of leaves.

Most likely, removing canes in this manner should only occur every three years or so, but each shrub is different, so research your particular shrub if you choose to prune more often. Many of these shrubs can be pruned now; however, some, such as flowering quince, mock orange and early-spring blooming spireas, should be pruned after flowering. Most shrubs should be well established (at least three years old) before any pruning is done.

If you have ruined the shape of your multi-cane shrubs by improper pruning, you will be glad to know that many of these types of shrubs may be given a rejuvenation pruning - pruning all or most of their canes to the ground. This is a drastic measure and the proper timing of this type of pruning is important for success.

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