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# *Pruning Rural Landscapes*



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## ON THE COVER

Landscape improvement demonstration of Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Whaley in Whaley Chapel Community, Cooke County, Texas. It was one of the first landscape improvement demonstrations established through Home Demonstration work in Texas. Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Whaley were assisted in their planning by County Home Demonstration Agent Lela Owenby and Home Improvement Specialist Bernice Claytor. Succeeding agents have assisted as needed. This yard was planted in 1924. Sensible and constant pruning has added to the neat appearance of the well kept grounds. An evergreen wild peach or cherry laurel accents the door way. Although this is a large growing plant and makes a small tree if left to grow, Mr. Whaley has constantly pruned it low enough to use as a doorway plant. In developing the Whaley landscape native plants have been utilized such as scarlet sage, red bud, yucca, pecans and walnuts. Mrs. Waley said: "I have some kind of shrub or tree in bloom from early spring until fall. I have planted bulbs here and there to add color. I like to use bulbs and shrubs for flowers because they do not have to be planted every year. From them I cut branches of flowers to use in the house. Shrubs will stand more dry weather than annuals. As I grow older I find that I can work less and less in the yard." Mrs. Whaley and her neighbor, Mrs. Abner Enderbee have assisted many people in the community to plan their landscapes.

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Vegetables and flowers growing near a mock orange hedge were stunted by the thick network of roots growing out from the hedge. A sharp spade forced into the ground cut most of them. A narrow trench left open discourages their spreading.

Home of Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Jensen, College Station.

# Pruning Rural Landscapes

Sadie Hatfield, Extension Specialist in  
Landscape Gardening

"The greatest acquisition of all is common sense. Common sense is simply a wide and perfect knowledge of common things and how to use them.

"For once in the history of civilization let us have a common people thoroughly trained within the lines of their duties, full of the science of how to get a living, refined, courageous, and loyal to government and to God."—Seaman A. Knapp.

Pruning is one of the things which people learn to do by doing. Good pruning can be done by using common sense, by studying and observing plants. When pruning is slowly and thoughtfully done by the beginner, it often develops into an art from which genuine pleasure is derived. To one who learns about it there is as much pleasure in pruning and training the plants as there is in planting and growing them.

Pruning is not a difficult nor mysterious job. Obstacles for the beginner are lack of courage and lack of proper tools. Failure to prune results in a neglected and unattractive landscape. Most people do a great deal of pruning without realizing it. For instance, pinching the tops of tomato plants to make them branch rather than to form tall plants is one kind of pruning.

## Why Prune

The results desired in pruning are the same as those in planting a landscape: to maintain comfort, convenience and beauty in the home grounds. Pruning helps solve many problems.

## Some Questions Should Be Asked Before Starting

(1) Do any of the shrubs need to be changed in size and form to make

a pleasing picture? Have plants grown too tall for the places in which they are standing? Has their width increased until they are crowding each other? Do some plants need to be removed entirely? This is often the



shrubs allowed to spread into walks, drives and roads are nuisances. Pruning is needed here for the sake of convenience as well as appearance. This kind can be done almost any time of the year if only a few branches are cut.

sensible thing to do. This is especially true to old well established plantings or overcrowded plantings.

(2) Are the plants thin and spindly? Which branches may be cut to produce new compact growth? Are they too dense? If they are, perhaps pruning should begin at the ground or at the center of the shrub, not at the top.

(3) Are some of the plants beginning to look old and gnarled? Has the bark on them become old and rough? Cutting of the lower branches to let fresh sprouts come up from the ground usually helps to freshen and invigorate the plant.

(4) Have some of the plants outgrown their places and taken space needed by other plants, by walks or drives? Such plants need to be removed, or reduced in size.

(5) Do limbs or parts of limbs nearest the ground toward the outside form a natural facing of foliage?

Could they be pruned to give naturalness and grace to the plant? Avoid pruning shrubs so they will look like tiny shade trees.

(6) Are the plants monotonous in size? Do some need to be cut to form lower shrubs?

#### Pruning Improves Convenience

For the sake of convenience shade trees are pruned so that people may walk under them or walk about them without taking extra steps. Shrubs growing near driveways and walks need frequent pruning to keep them from covering the walk. An overgrown shrub is not only a nuisance in wet weather but inconvenient to walk around any time. Low hanging limbs which interfere with traffic on roads and driveways should be cut back. Such limbs often make a serious traffic hazard. Limbs having a tendency to grow up should be left in preference to those that grow downward and get in the way. At inter-



Plants of varying heights and sizes are more interesting than plants pruned off to one size or shape. Continuous trimming and shaping while they are growing will keep them small enough to beautify rather than hide a house. An informal and pleasing effect takes thought and planning.

Home of Mr. and Mrs. R. P. Garrett, White's Chapel, Navarro County.





In pruning crowded shrubs which have many branches or sprouts, it is often a good idea to cut sprouts at the ground level until the necessary thinning has been done.

Thin plants may need to be thickened by cutting branches near the ground. This forces out new shoots. This is a good way to begin pruning spirea, flowering quince, jasmine and other shrubs with many shoots. Compare this with drawings of shrubs further on in the bulletin.

sections of roads and streets, corner plantings often cause disastrous car accidents. It is the duty of the owner of such plantings to keep them low or remove them. It is better in the first place to plant medium sized or slow growing shrubs. They will not continuously spread into walks and driveways. Once set and growing it is often easier to prune than to take up misplaced plants and put out others.

#### Pruning Improves Comfort

If mistakes have been made in planting the landscape and tall growing shrubs are placed in front of windows where they shut out needed light, they should be pruned enough to permit the desired amount of sun-

light to enter the house. Several prunings may be needed during the growing season.

If too near the house for convenience cut out the branches on the side next to the house. By leaving buds or limbs which point away from the house and by cutting those next to the house, room is left for air and sun light to enter and prevent mold and decay. Painting or working on the house is made easier. In some cases where too much summer sunlight enters a room a tall growing shrub which drops its leaves in the winter may be wanted in front of a window. Such shrubs should be cut back so that they will not reach above the top of a window.

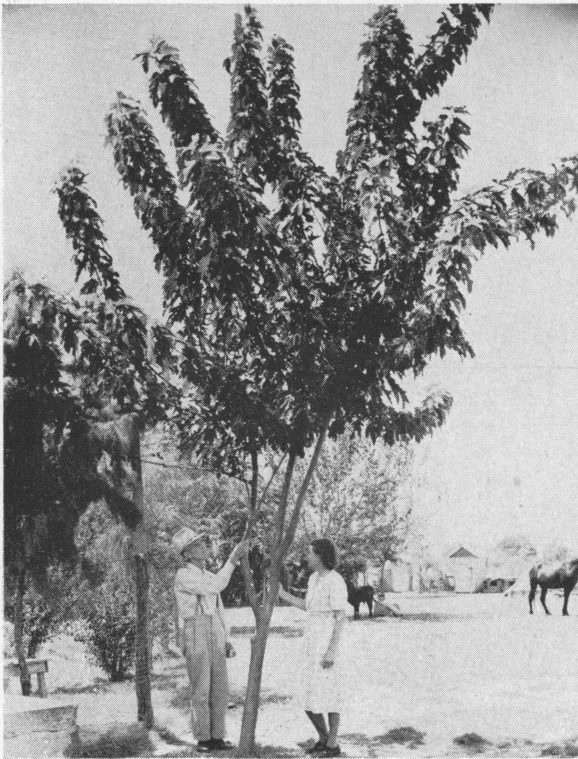
Limbs which grow too long and scrape the house when they are blown back and forth by the wind should be cut off.

### Pruning Improves Appearance

One of the main reasons for pruning is to improve the looks of the homestead. Dead and injured branches make the grounds look cluttered and ill kept. All such limbs should be removed leaving the healthy green parts of the plants. Removing branches covered with mildew and scale not only help appearances but they should be removed and burned to destroy the disease. Since it is a common

mistake to plant too many shrubs at the beginning, it is often necessary to relieve crowded conditions by pruning or by removing some of them. Often it is better to transplant a shrub than to leave it in a crowded place. If the plant is old or unthrifty it might be removed and thrown away.

Pruning stimulates flowering. The beauty of many shrubs is improved by cutting off branches and encouraging new growth. Althea and crape myrtle for instance should be cut back each year to stimulate new growth. Blooms formed on new limbs are larger than those on old or un-



Cutting lower limbs from shade trees make it convenient to walk or drive under them. The earlier the tree is trained the better the result. Sunburn on the body of trees pruned high may be prevented by covering the trunk with burlap, pasteboard or other materials to prevent sunscald until the tree is large enough to shade its trunk. Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Kelly, Maverick County.



Before pruning the overgrown shrubs almost hid the house.

Shrubs not pruned give an unkept appearance to the surroundings. This picture shows the type of limbs that often need to be cut first.



The same house immediately after pruning by thinning and cutting at irregular heights. The place looks neater and more attractive.

pruned wood. If permitted to grow the crape myrtle makes a tree in the warmer parts of the state. In the warm parts of the state the lilac needs to have some of the new wood cut out so flowers will form on the old wood.

### Pruning Stimulates Growth

Some plants need to be cut back occasionally to make them form a more dense plant while others need some of their limbs cut out to thin the plant and give it a more interesting character. Some trees like the mesquite can be pruned to make them form a fairly dense shade. Trees like the anaqua and live oak may need thinning so the sun can pass through their branches.

When shrubs are transplanted from the woods or a nursery to the landscape a part of the root system will be lost. For this reason it is necessary to assist the plant in balancing itself by cutting off part of the top. One half to three fourths of the roots are usually lost. It follows that one half to three fourths of the top should be cut off. While many plants will thrive without being pruned at transplanting time many will die when the top is more than the root system can support. For instance many people have "bad luck" in transplanting American holly, yaupon and dogwood. They find that their "luck" improves when they cut off three fourths or more of the tops. Cutting of the tops should be done even if the plants are moved with a ball of undisturbed soil on their roots. Nursery trained plants require less top pruning. Young plants grown from seed or cuttings make better shaped plants when they are pruned several

times while in the cutting bed. Pinching off the ends of long branches will cause side limbs to grow. Small and young native shrubs survive transplanting better than older plants.

Old plants which look as if they had lost most of their vitality may be stimulated by cutting back severely. Often it is a good idea to cut such plants off within an inch or two of the ground so that their tops may form all new growth.

### Prune in Winter

Winter is the best time for pruning nearly all plants. Winter pruning tends to stimulate growth of twigs and leaves. It is thought by many that summer pruning tends to dwarf plants. The main objection to pruning spring blooming plants in winter, is that they will have fewer blossoms. The plant itself is not injured but a crop of blossoms or fruit will be lost. Among the narrow leafed evergreen plants which are generally pruned in winter are arbor vitae, cedar, juniper and pines. Broad leaf evergreens and deciduous shrubs which bloom in late summer are generally pruned in the winter. Among the broad leaf evergreens are such plants as abelia, florida jasmine, agartita, elaeagnus, euonymous, gardenias, or cape jasmine, yaupon, lavender, cherry laurel, privets and ligustrums. Among the broad leaf evergreens which bloom early in the spring are photinia and pyracatha.

When they are cut back in winter all or a large portion of the bloom buds are destroyed and the plants will not have a full crop of berries the following year. Since pyracantha and photinia grow rapidly it is sug-



Pruning as severely as this is rarely necessary. A better shaped plant will result if the plant is cut off at ground level and allowed to send up new shoots. Some thinning and training will need to be done the next year in order to shape the plant. Painting wounds and cuts with shellac is a good practice. It protects the plant from disease which might enter the cut.

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gested that a few of the tallest limbs be cut back each year so that these plants will not only have berries on lower branches but on half of the upper branches too. These two shrubs should be shaped from the time they are small plants so that it will not be necessary to cut off a great deal of wood at any one time.

Late flowering shrubs should be pruned in the winter because they make their blooms and buds the same summer that the bloom comes out. Cutting back usually improves the blooms of such plants as crape myrtle, althea, vitex, desert willow, butterfly bush, lantana, hibiscus, salt cedar and bird of paradise and many others.



Since narrow leafed evergreens like cedars, arborvitae and junipers are difficult to prune they should be planted where larger growth is needed. Otherwise a part of the plants will need to be removed. Constant pruning and shearing to shape may hold them in check, but it is hard work that should be done several times a year if plants are to be held to a certain size and shape. Only the dwarf varieties should be placed near the foundation of a medium sized or small house. Often the beauty of these plants depends upon their being able to develop natural forms. This is another argument for placing them where they can grow as large as they will. Many people make the mistake of planting too close to the house,



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The shrub looked like th's in September after it had been pruned early in the spring. Being an evergreen it will eventually conceal the severe cutting. A plant which sheds its leaves in winter will show awkward growth resulting from severe pruning as soon as leaves fall.

walks and drives. During the winter shade trees and fruit trees should be pruned. If fruit and flowers are expected only a part of the limbs should be cut off.

### Prune In Spring

After shrubs bloom early in the spring they should be cut back immediately so that they may begin to form flower buds for the next spring. Some pruning may be done while these shrubs are in bloom by cutting off blossoms for use in the house. By observing the blooming time of shrubs it is easy to know which ones should be pruned early. Among the common ones which bloom early and should be pruned early are spirea or bridal wreath, flowering quince, forsythia, dogwood, wistaria, winter blooming jasmine, and winter blooming honey suckle.

Shrubs and trees neglected during the winter may be pruned until the middle of July. Pruning after mid summer does not allow enough time for the plants to mature and harden new growth before frost. When this happens injury may be suffered from cold weather.

### Prune In Summer

It is well to remember that some light pruning should be done during summer but heavy pruning which produces an abundance of new growth late in the year is dangerous. Suckers on tree trunks should be cut off. If a second crop of flowers is desired from crape myrtle, vitex and other late blooming plants the flower tips should be removed before seeds are formed. When summer flowers, like petunias grow into unattractive forms

they may be cut back. New growth will bloom before frost.

### Prune Any Time

Some kinds of pruning may be done any time of the year. Dead limbs, diseased limbs, limbs that rub and injure each other should be removed regardless of season. When limbs are injured by wind or accidents prune so as to leave no ragged edges. A clean smooth cut can be healed by a plant more quickly than rough cuts and breaks. When a late freeze injures plants it is a good idea to let them alone until all danger of freezing is past. The dead or injured wood may give some protection to the live part of the plant.

Limbs causing inconvenience about the place may be removed. The tips of plants growing into long unattractive forms may be cut back some but pruning should be light: for instance the abelia, florida jasmine, elaeagnus and many other plants will send out long vine like limbs during late summer and fall. Cutting the tips from these will help to form a more compact plant. It is permissible to cut sprouts from root stock which are trying to crowd out the grafted part of the plant. This is often necessary to keep the root stocks from crowding out grafts on roses, euonymous, elaeagnus and other plants.

### How To Prune

To keep the farmstead in harmony with the informal spirit of the country and small towns natural or informal landscaping is generally used for farm and ranch homes. In most rural homes, there are seasons during which the landscape must be neg-



The first step in pruning is to study the plant and decide which limbs should be removed to produce the desired effect.

Before pruning the roof was being injured by this ligustrum and it was growing onto the porch. The side of the house was almost hidden.



It took care and thought to get this natural effect in recently pruned shrubs.

The ligustrum was cut back to allow the cenizo shrub room to grow.

The shrubs have been reduced in size so that the house and the shrubs both can be seen.



lected for crops. Plants trained to look natural do not show weeks of neglect. Plants pruned into unnatural forms such as globes, walls and cones look neglected in a few days. The natural shape of a plant is more graceful and usually more attractive than artificial forms.

Unless one is accustomed to pruning, the job should be done very slowly, taking out one limb at a time and standing back to study the effect, using the imagination to decide what the results will be when growth has taken place.

Decide why the plant should be pruned. There must be one or more good reasons in mind before cutting any limbs.

### How To Prune

1. Plan all large cuts before taking off any small limbs.

2. Use sharp tools.

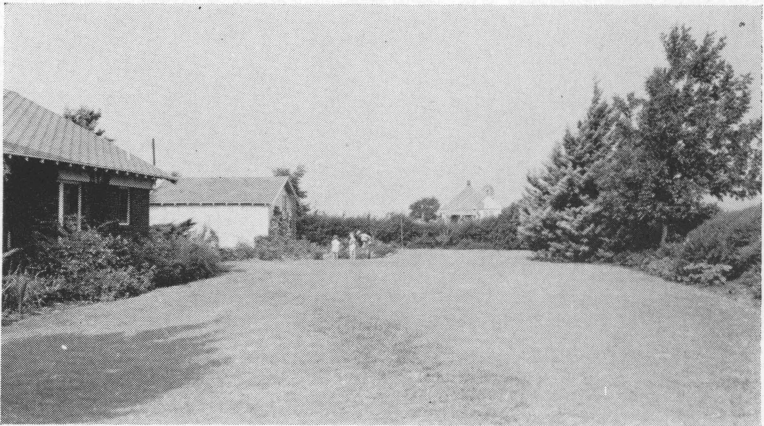
a. For a successful and easy job of pruning, tools should be sharp

and clean. Dull shears or saws make hard work and leave ragged cuts which may result in diseased plants. For keeping the ordinary landscape in good condition, a pair of short handled pruning shears, a pair of long handled pruning shears and a saw are needed. If these tools are lacking, much good work can be done with ordinary wood saw and any kind of sharp knives that will cut the shrub.

b. It is a good idea to disinfect tools when diseased plants are pruned. Gasoline or alcohol may be used for this purpose.

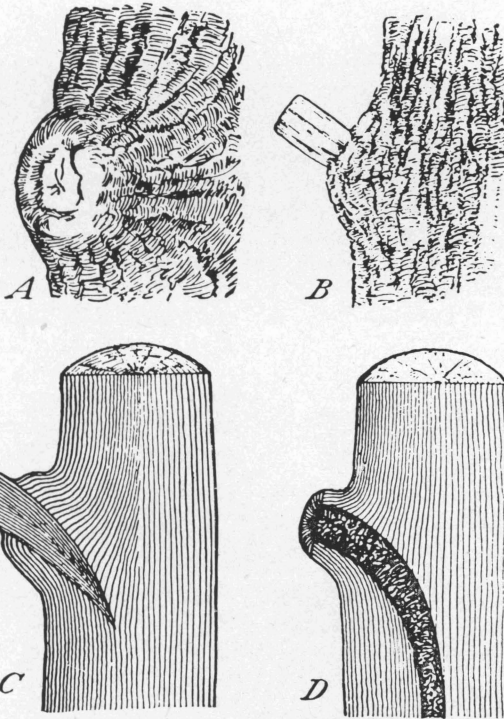
3. Leave no stubs.

a. All cuts should be sharp and clean, leaving no stubs. A limb to be cut from the main body should be cut at the growth ring and parallel to the limb from which it springs. In heading back top growth or side growth, cuts should be made just above a bud pointing in the desired direction of the new growth.



Shrubs screening the back and sides give a feeling of ease by their natural and graceful growth. Few of them need pruning except those about the foundation of the house and the crowded pecan tree. Home of Mrs. Elizabeth Gillen, Saginaw, Texas.





A. Cut made close to trunk and followed by prompt healing; B. cut made too far from trunk, precluding healing; C. stub resulting from incorrect pruning shown in B; D. decay following nonremoval of stub.—Courtesy of U. S. D. A.

b. In removing large branches of trees, make an undercut first, so as to avoid the splitting of limbs from the main body of the trees.

**4. Cut out all dead, dying, diseased or injured limbs first.**

When the object in pruning is to force new and attractive growth from old shrubs, much of the plant or sometimes the entire plant may be cut off at or near ground level. From the established root system, young growth will spring up. This is frequently necessary with such plants as elder berry, French mulberry, native sumac, ligustrums, privets and

most others except narrow leafed conifers.

If it is not deemed desirable to cut all the growth, one-fifth or one-sixth of the growth should be cut near or at the ground. It is well to reach inside and down to the base of the plant in order to get those branches which lack vigor and those which have a rough appearance. Plants with many sprouts like bridal wreath and bush honeysuckle are easily pruned this way. In shaping hedges or screening plants, it is well to leave them wider at the bottom than at the top so that sunlight may reach the

lower branches and help to keep them in a healthy condition.

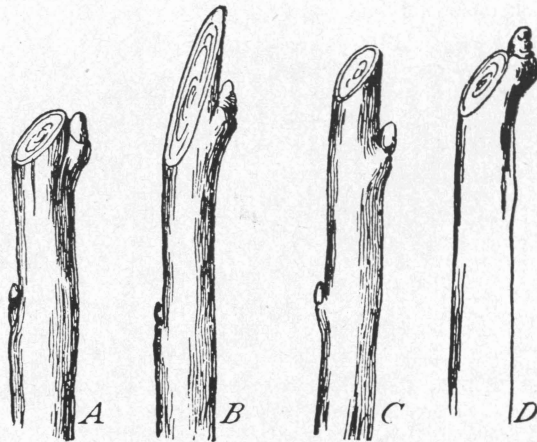
### 9. Prune roots with a spade.

Shrubs of vigorous growth like the armor river privet stunt nearby plants unless their roots are pruned. Root pruning and top pruning may be done at the same time. A spade may be used to root prune. It should be thrust into the ground to a depth of 8 to 14 inches. If the roots are too large to be cut easily in this manner, a narrow trench may be dug to a depth of 10 to 14 inches. After clipping the roots the soil should be repacked. When available galvanized sheet iron and other materials can be used as a barrier to further growth of roots: or in shallow soils dig a trench into the sub soil and leave open to prevent root spread. It may be desirable to check the growth of plants in this way to hold them to the proper size for the place which has been allotted to them. Root pruning tends to check vegetative growth

and encourages the production of blooms and fruit.

### Some Plants Need No Pruning

Shrubs and trees growing in a windbreak are not pruned, but allowed to form branches near the ground to check winds. Screen plantings ordinarily need little if any pruning. Some demonstrators think it desirable to root prune them so that flowering shrubs, iris, vegetables or fruits may be grown near them. Trees and shrubs used as specimen plants or free standing plants should be placed where they need no pruning. Such plants, usually grown for their beautiful or unusual forms, should be permitted to develop naturally. Among the most common of these are the deodora cedar and Arizona cypress. Little or no pruning is needed for dwarf plants such as dwarf pomegranate and dwarf gardenias. Great care should be exercised in pruning plants which take a long time to form flowers such as camellias.

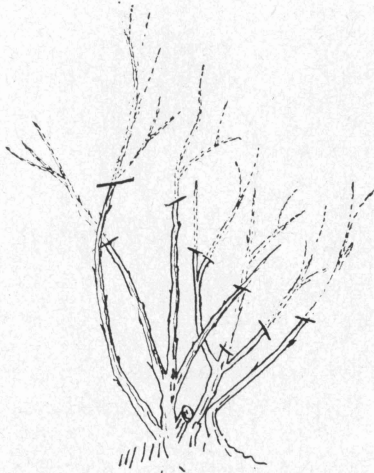


Right and wrong ways of cutting off shoots: A, Right way; B, C, D, wrong ways.—Courtesy of U. S. D. A.

## Practice Is Needed

Practice and study must go hand in hand if satisfactory results are to be had. Thoughtless cutting and slashing away plants will give disappointing results and of course study is of almost no value without practice. You can judge your own work. First of all the less a shrub shows to a passerby that it has been pruned the better the pruning. Shrubs that have been allowed to grow several seasons without cutting back will look bare when first pruned. The second test, after one season is what growth has taken place, and one can then judge whether or not the job was done right. Here one may observe mistakes and profit by them the next time pruning is to be done.

If mistakes are apparent, that should cause no discouragements because vigorous plant will soon cover them up and the beginner can see how to do better next time. Keeping

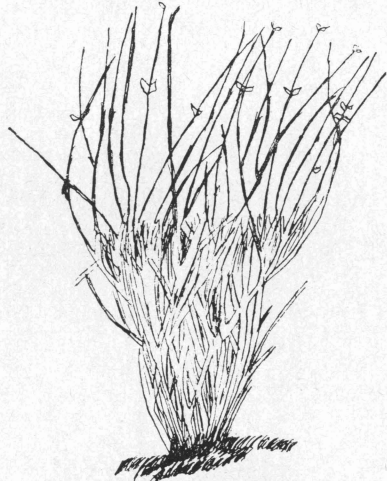


Limbs cut at different lengths from the ground help to maintain a graceful and natural form.

## Some Plants Require Special Attention

To prune or not to prune is an argument that has gone on a good many years among rose growers. Some advocate that they should be cut within a few inches of the ground each spring. Observations made at the Tyler, Texas Experiment Station, show that more blossoms are produced if roses are pruned lightly or left unpruned. For details see C-90 "Rose Growing For The Home Gardener." Some other plants need special attention such as crape myrtle, pyracantha and photinia as mentioned above. Data on special problems is found in Farmer's Bulletin 1826, "Care of Ornamental Shrubs and Trees".

Much can be learned from comparing experiences with other people at club meetings or other social functions.



This plant was pruned incorrectly. The appearance will be improved by cutting off at the ground one-fifth to one-half of the oldest sprouts and weakest branches.

a plant diary or garden calendar is not only interesting but is valuable as a reference.

#### References:

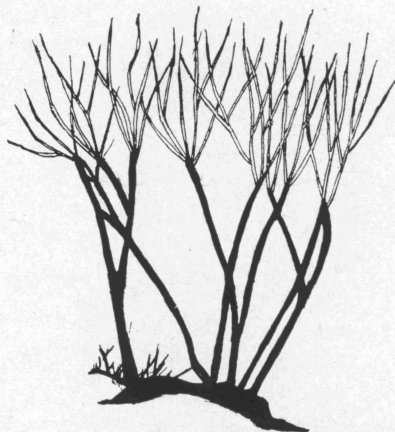
C-90, "Rose Growing for the Home Gardener", Texas Experiment Station.

Farmers' Bulletin 1826, "Care of Ornamental Shrubs and Trees", Texas A. and M. College Extension Service.

Farmers' Bulletin 1870, "Pruning Hardy Fruit Plants," Texas A. and M. College Extension Service.

Extension Service B-120, "The Pecan in Texas."

Extension Service B-73, "Orchard Management."



Cutting all limbs at an even height gives an awkward and unnatural appearance. This type of pruning results in growth as shown above.



Athel, turk oak and oleanders were used to form a screen for the wash house and clothes lines. This screen is far enough away from the house to require little or no pruning. A pleasing contrast of foliage is found here.  
Home of Mr. and Mrs. J. O. Johnson, Kingsville, Texas.

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