A FREE PRINTABLE GUIDE FROM GARDENS & GARDENING

Pruning *Calendar*

When to cut back 22 popular roses, shrubs, climbers, trees and soft fruit — and why getting the timing right matters more than how sharp your secateurs are.

22 PLANTS · BEST TIME TO PRUNE · HOW HARD TO CUT

BEFORE YOU START

The one rule that matters most

IF YOU REMEMBER NOTHING ELSE

Flowers before midsummer? Prune right after flowering. Flowers from midsummer onward? Prune in late winter, while the plant is dormant. Get this the wrong way round and you cut off next year's flowers before they've even formed.

OLD WOOD VS NEW WOOD

Old wood is growth from last year or earlier. **New wood** is growth made this spring or summer. Many plants only flower on one or the other — that's the whole reason timing matters.

BEST TIME TO PRUNE

A specific window, not an exact date — weather shifts it by a week or two each year. When unsure, it's almost always safer to prune a little later than a little early.

WHY THIS TIMING

The reason behind the rule, whether that's protecting next year's flowers, avoiding disease, or stopping a wound from "bleeding" sap.

HOW MUCH TO CUT

A short, practical guide to how hard to go — from a light tidy-up to cutting right back to a low framework.

TOOLS & TECHNIQUE, IN BRIEF

Use clean, sharp secateurs — a crushed stem heals far more slowly than a clean cut. Cut just above a healthy bud, sloping the cut away from it, and always remove anything dead, damaged or diseased first, whatever else you do.

CHECK FOR NESTING BIRDS FIRST

Before cutting any hedge or shrub between March and August, check for active nests. Disturbing one is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 — when in doubt, wait.

THE PRUNING CALENDAR

1 of 3 — Roses, climbers & flowering shrubs

PLANT	BEST TIME TO PRUNE	WHY THIS TIMING	HOW MUCH TO CUT
Bush & shrub roses	**Late winter (Feb–Mar)**	Flowers on new growth, so cutting back hard before spring boosts blooms	Cut all stems back by a third to a half, to an outward-facing bud
Climbing roses	**Late winter (Feb–Mar)**	Repeat-flowers through summer on this year's growth	Shorten flowered side shoots to 2–3 buds; remove 1–2 oldest stems at the base
Rambling roses	**Late summer, after flowering**	Flowers once on last year's growth — pruning now gives new shoots time to ripen	Remove a third of the oldest stems at the base; shorten side shoots by two-thirds
Wisteria	**Twice: Jul–Aug, then Jan–Feb**	A two-stage cut controls size in summer, then exposes flower buds for spring	Summer: shorten whippy shoots to 5–6 leaves. Winter: cut the same shoots to 2–3 buds
Clematis — Group 1 (e.g. montana)	**After flowering, in spring**	Flowers on last year's growth	Minimal — just tidy; avoid hard cuts more than once every 3 years
Clematis — Group 2 (large-flowered)	**February**	Flowers on short shoots from last year's growth, with a second flush on new growth	Light prune only — remove dead tips, deadhead after the first flush
Clematis — Group 3 (e.g. viticella)	**February**	Flowers only on this year's growth	Cut back hard to the lowest pair of healthy buds, about 30cm up
Hydrangea (mophead & lacecap)	**March**	Old flowerheads shield next year's buds from frost over winter	Cut to the first healthy bud pair below each faded flowerhead

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2 of 3 — Flowering shrubs & hedges

PLANT	BEST TIME TO PRUNE	WHY THIS TIMING	HOW MUCH TO CUT
Hydrangea paniculata	**Early spring**	Flowers on this year's growth — a hard prune means bigger blooms	Cut last year's stems back to a low, permanent framework
Lavender	**August, after flowering**	Stops the plant becoming leggy and bare at the base	Trim spent flower spikes plus ~2cm of leafy growth — never cut into bare wood
Buddleja (butterfly bush)	**March–April**	Flowers on this year's growth; a hard prune keeps it compact	Cut back hard to a low framework, 30–60cm from the ground
Forsythia, Philadelphus & Weigela	**Straight after flowering**	All flower on last year's growth — pruning late removes next year's buds	Cut flowered stems to strong new shoots; remove about 1 in 5 oldest stems
Evergreen hedges	**Early spring or late summer**	Avoids triggering soft new growth that frost can then damage	Light, regular trims rather than one hard annual cut
Deciduous hedges	**Late winter, while dormant**	Easiest to see the shape with no leaves, and no sap loss	One thorough cut is usually enough for the whole year
Box & topiary	**August**	New growth has hardened off, cutting the risk of scorch and box blight	Trim lightly to shape; avoid cutting in early summer entirely
Apple & pear trees (free-standing)	**Midwinter (Dec–Feb), dormant**	No leaves to hide the shape, and the tree isn't actively growing	Remove dead or crossing growth; shorten last year's growth by about a third

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THE PRUNING CALENDAR

3 of 3 — Fruit trees & soft fruit

PLANT	BEST TIME TO PRUNE	WHY THIS TIMING	HOW MUCH TO CUT
Trained fruit trees (cordons, espaliers)	**August**	Checks vigorous growth and redirects energy into fruiting spurs	Cut new side shoots back to 2–3 leaves from their base
Plums, cherries & stone fruit	**Summer only — never winter**	Winter cuts risk silver leaf, a fungal disease that enters through fresh wounds	Remove dead or damaged wood only; always prune in dry weather
Summer-fruiting raspberries	**After harvest, late summer**	This year's canes have already fruited and won't fruit again	Cut fruited (brown, woody) canes to the ground; tie in the new green canes
Autumn-fruiting raspberries	**February, while dormant**	Next year's crop grows entirely on canes made from scratch next spring	Cut every single cane down to ground level
Blackcurrants	**February**	Fruits best on younger wood, so old stems are swapped out each year	Remove about a third of the oldest, darkest stems at the base
Acers, birches & vines	**Nov–Dec only**	Cutting from midwinter into spring makes the wound “bleed” sap	Avoid pruning these at all between January and midsummer

Timings assume an average UK season — a cold spring or mild autumn can shift things by a couple of weeks either way. Always check for nesting birds before cutting any hedge or shrub between March and August; disturbing an active nest is an offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Never guess the timing again

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