



Pruning Junipers

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Junipers are a varied group of evergreens that include spreading, creeping, upright and pyramidal forms. They respond well to pruning and can be maintained for years at a desirable height and spread when pruned properly and regularly. Junipers do not produce buds on old wood and subsequently will not respond to drastic pruning. If specimens become overgrown, replacement rather than severe pruning usually is necessary.

All junipers develop a "dead zone" in the center of the plant resulting from insufficient light to the inside branches. The term "dead zone" is somewhat misleading because the branches in this area actually are living. However, new growth will not develop from the dead zone because of the absence of live buds on these interior, shaded branches. When pruning, sufficient green foliage should be left on the plant surrounding the dead zone so that it is not exposed. If pruned back to the dead zone, new growth will not be produced resulting in a stagnant, unsightly plant.

TIMING OF PRUNING

Junipers respond best to pruning in early spring just prior to budbreak. Pruning at this time will allow the plant to fill in quickly and retain a natural appearance. Early spring pruning also allows removal of broken and winter-injured branches. Light pruning can be undertaken at nearly any time of the year. Major pruning should be

avoided in late summer as this could encourage a late flush of growth, which would not harden off before frost.

HOW TO PRUNE

The best method for pruning junipers is selective thinning of the crown. A branch is cut off at its point of origin on the parent stem or back to the lateral or to a "Y" of a branch junction. The lateral or remaining stem then becomes the new terminal. (See Technical Report *Pruning Ornamental Shrubs* for general discussion of techniques for pruning shrubs.)

The selective thinning method is the least conspicuous and produces a more open, natural-looking plant. In selective thinning, emphasis should be placed on removing dead, broken, diseased, weak and interior, shaded branches. Remove the weaker or least desirable of crossed or rubbing branches. Such removal should not leave large holes in the general outline of the plant. Selective thinning will not stimulate excessive terminal growth and the size of the plant can be reduced without changing its natural appearance.

SELECTIVE THINNING

Spreading Junipers (PFITZERS)

Spreading junipers require annual pruning of dominant branches to promote uniform growth. To create a layered effect, reduce the length of the branches gradually from top to bottom. Remove sufficient growth to

produce a desirable appearance. Do not overlook the possibility that an entire branch should be removed.

When severe pruning is necessary to reduce the size of or prevent overlapping growth of spreading junipers, it may be necessary to remove a large amount of foliage from the top. Care must be taken to leave enough green foliage on top to flush out and cover the dead zone.

Prune side limbs to create better balance. Early spring is the best time to attempt this kind of pruning because new growth will quickly restore the plant's natural beauty and will reduce the likelihood of scorch on exposed limbs.

Creeping Junipers (Andorra, Blue Rug, etc)
The pruning procedures for spreading junipers also apply to creeping forms. Cut back protruding limbs to a vigorous lateral branch and never leave stubs.

Severe pruning requires removal of many center branches to reduce the "mound" of growth and allow light and air penetration. Remove crossing limbs until only limbs, which radiate from a central axis remain. Proceed with the thinning out method on protruding branches. New growth will conceal the exposed crown rapidly if pruning is done in early spring.

Spreading Junipers - Where cuts should be made to reduce the size or reduce overlapping.

Semi-upright Junipers (Hetzi, etc.)
The pruning method for spreading junipers is applicable to semi-upright forms. If severe pruning is required, cut back main limbs to a vigorous lateral branch. Locate the dead zone first and leave some green twigs on every cut limb. Prune side limbs lightly.

Pyramidal Junipers
Maintenance pruning of pyramidal junipers involves occasional thinning of dominant

branches and leaders to maintain uniform growth and natural beauty. These junipers have a tendency to form multiple leaders, which can result in branch breakage from snow and ice accumulation. Removal of multiple leaders early in the life of the plant is extremely important.

PYRAMIDAL JUNIPERS - Left, before pruning; Center, 20% of top removed; and right, sides pruned to restore shape.

Topping pyramidal junipers may be necessary to maintain a certain height; however, the cut must be made above the dead zone to insure development of a new leader. Cut back the terminal at the junction of a lateral branch. The diameter of the remaining lateral should be at least a third the size of the cut in order to prevent further dieback of the terminal. Reshape by pruning side branches.

SHEARING

Shearing junipers into tightly shaped forms is a common pruning practice. This is not a recommended method in landscape maintenance unless a formal hedge is desired. Pruning junipers with hedge shears results in much new growth arising from the cut stubs.

Plants pruned by this method only gain in height and spread each year and may outgrow their original space in the landscape. These junipers lose their natural form and attractiveness. If shearing is necessary for a formalized situation, it should be done before new growth appears in the spring.

SHEARING - Results in excess terminal twigs and unnatural look.