

PRUNING

Maintenance of Australian plants should be seen as being no different from that accorded plants from other parts of the world. All plants need soil, moisture and nutrients in the correct amounts to grow their best. Some are more demanding than others, but the myth that Australian plants will survive without any attention, is just that, a myth.

Pruning of Australian plants is just as important as it is for roses. Knowing what to do and when, is sometimes a challenge. Plants that are not pruned will probably never reach their full potential as garden plants. Plants in the bush have a certain appeal in their natural habitat, but as horticulture specimens we expect our plants to look “better”, so we water when needed, and sometimes we even add fertiliser and mulch to help the plants thrive.

The mechanics of pruning is not a science, and everyone is capable of doing a relatively expert job. The main concern is when to prune. **For herbaceous plants** such as *Brachycome*, *Chrysocephalum*, *Dampiera*, *Rhodanthe*, *Scaevola* and *Wahlenbergia*, I find that heavy cutting back prior to the spring growth, produces a flush of new growth and a more compact plant full of flowers. For my conditions this is done in late August, but it would be wise to delay this if in your area you experience frosts, as the regrowth might be burned.

As for **woody plants**, the best time to cut them back is during, or just after flowering. If you like the idea of having a vase of fresh flowers, pruning whilst flowering achieves two aims, lovely fresh flowers, and plant already pruned and ready to grow away as a more compact plant. There is a range of Australian plants which benefit from this treatment. It is wise to cut more length than you might need for the vase, and then trim to the required length. Plants which benefit from this early pruning include *Adenanthos*, particularly the grey foliated forms, *Alyogyne*, *Bauera*, *Boronia*, *Correa*, *Crowea*, *Dracophyllum*, *Epacris*, *Eriostemon*, *Geleznovia*, *Guichenotia*, *Isopogon*, *Lechenaultia biloba*, *Micromyrtus*, *Olearia*, *Ozothamnus*, *Petrophile*, *Pimelea*, *Prostanthera* and *Tetratheca*. As a guide, removing up to one third of the growth is ideal, and should result in the plant growing away strongly before the heat of summer.

With the **smaller woody MYRTACEAE**, such as *Actinodium*, *Astartea*, *Baekkea*, *Beaufortia*, *Chamelaucium* and *Darwinia*, plants respond to harder pruning provided they are growing vigorously. Of course we have all noticed that **larger MYRTACEAE** such as *Callistemon*, *Leptospermum* and *Melaleuca* will grow away readily when pruned into old wood, if such drastic action is necessary to rejuvenate old, neglected plants.

Many **heath plants**, such as *Epacris*, *Leucopogon* and *Sprengelia*, can be pruned quite hard, back into old wood, but it is important that the plants are growing well. If the weather has been dry for some time, watering a day or two before pruning will also assist the plants recover.

The picture shows that other plants also respond well to severe pruning. This plant is *Ceratopetalum gummiferum*, NSW Christmas Bush, which had grown into an 8m tree, and was cut back to a stump.

The same response is noted for *Eleaocarpus reticulatus*, Blue Berry Ash.

Pea plants present a challenge, as they are usually quick growing and can get bigger than expected. It is recommended that the plants are pruned from their first year, and after flowering but before the seed matures, they can be



pruned back about one third, but be advised that some do not respond well to being cut back into wood which has no foliage. Plants such as *Bossiaea*, *Daviesia*, *Dillwynia*, *Eutaxia*, *Goodia*, *Hovea*, *Mirbelia*, and *Pultenaea* do better if pruned only as far as growing wood. Others such as *Aotus*, *Hardenbergia* and *Kennedia* can be cut severely and respond positively. *Indigofera* is best if the old stems are pruned right to ground level, allowing the young suckers to develop. *Jacksonia* and *Viminaria* can be spoiled by pruning, losing their natural weeping habit, so this needs to be considered if these plants need to be reduced in size. It might be better to remove some branches to open the plants up, so allowing light to other plants in the vicinity.

With all pruning, I feel the plants benefit from a deep watering after pruning to encourage new growth.

Fertilising is best left for some time after pruning, but a dose of seaweed concentrate watered around the root system will also be appreciated.

Christmas is nearly here, so it might be worthwhile purchasing yourself, or hinting that a nice new pair of secateurs would be an ideal present. These need to be good quality so that the job of pruning does not become too tiring. Really, it should be a pleasant pastime, using your time to get the best from your plants. Cheap secateurs are not really a good investment. There are a number of FELCO lookalikes on the market, but nothing beats the real thing. I prefer Felco 2 as a general purpose pruning tool. They are easy to keep sharp and the cutting edge is replaceable.

We can all learn from each other, so with this in mind, I would appreciate members relating their own story on pruning, success and not so happy results. Anything on this topic would be useful education for all members.

To keep the topic relevant to members, I would also like members to send in their own questions on pruning Australian plants, be they specific or general. All questions will be answered in a subsequent newsletter.

Send your questions to me by email, to johnonvista49@outlook.com