

Pruning regularly is the best way to care for berry bushes and ornamental shrubs, but do you know how to prune correctly? This guide explains why you should do it, how and when.

## How to prune and propagate shrubs and woody plants

### WHY SHOULD YOU PRUNE?

Perennial plants are a very important part of a **stable ecosystem**. Their roots prevent **erosion**, their branches and leaves act as both **shelter and food for animals**, their growth stores **carbon in the soil** and **promotes healthy soil**. Perennial useful shrubs achieve all these good effects and at the same time produce food, medicine or flowers for humans.

Every year, garden owners prune their shrubs and trees to either shape them, rejuvenate them to promote growth, or reduce their size. Every time we do something like this, we create an opportunity to multiply the branches we have cut and make exact clones of the mother plant. At the same time, we have the opportunity to **increase local plant diversity**, and get a larger crop.

In addition, it can be expensive to fill a regular backyard garden with plants from a garden centre. However, if you work with nature, you can fill your garden with a free and abundant supply of plants. Therefore, we believe we should **all propagate the plants we prune**.

### TYPES OF CUTTINGS

Depending on the plants and the season, we can take cuttings from different types of branches and propagate them in different ways. There are two main types of cuttings: **"softwood"** and **"hardwood"**.

Examples of plants that can reproduce from **softwood cuttings include blueberries, sage, and lavender**, while you can take **hardwood cuttings from roses, vines, and currants**. You can find a list of plants that can be easily propagated from softwood cuttings and hardwood on page 3.



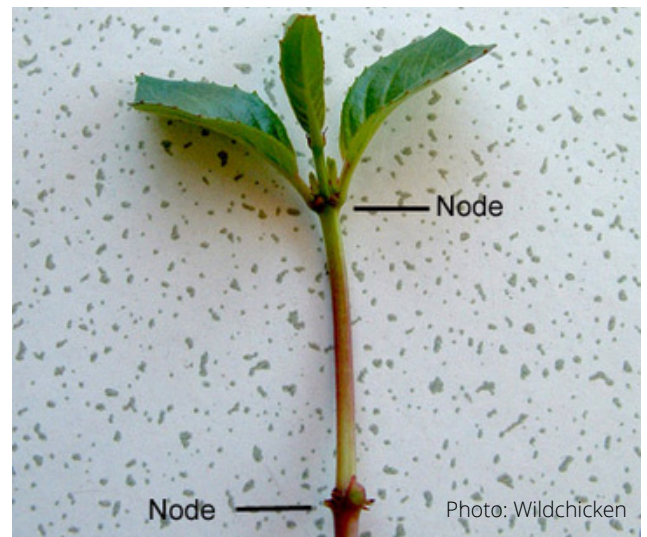
Softwood cuttings are taken and propagated from April-May to June. Hardwood cuttings are taken and propagated from March to April



Get neighbours involved, local entrepreneurs and NGOs



Pruning and propagating helps support local plant diversity and develop new skills



A softwood cutting ready to be planted



Hardwood cuttings ready to be put in soil



## THE BASICS OF PRUNING SHRUBS AND WOODY PLANTS

**Softwood cuttings** are taken and propagated from **April-May to June**. When we prune the branch, we first cut it to a size of between **20 and 30 cm**. Then we take off the lower leaves and place the cutting in sandy, well-drained soil with little nutrition. Drainage is very important so that the cutting does not rot. The soil should be moist but not wet.

At the same time, it is important to keep the **moisture** around the leaves of the cutting, so that it does not dry out. We can do this either by placing a bag over cutting or a cut-off plastic bottle. The humidity should be as close to 100% as possible. The cuttings need about **4-5 weeks to get roots**. After the cuttings have grown some roots, they can slowly start to get used to environments with lower humidity. We do this by gradually reducing the humidity around the cuttings.

This habituation process can take another **two to three weeks**, and it is important that the plant has plenty of time to get used to the new surroundings. Then the cuttings can be individually potted into well-drained soil with more nutrients. Once the cutting is used to these conditions, it is ready to be put in the ground in its final place. You will need to do this when **the summer is over and well before the first frost**.

**Hardwood cuttings** are much easier to propagate. They are taken and propagated from **March to April** before the leaves begin to open. Over the winter, the bush is dormant and we can take cuttings from it also. These cuttings are cut to **20-30 cm** length and placed the right way up either directly in the soil in its final place or in a pot. Here, soil composition is not as important, but partial or good drainage is preferred.

No plants like thirst, or to drown. When we put the cutting in the ground, we want to make sure that at least one or two growth points are underground and one is above. **The cuttings need a season to take root** and should not be disturbed during that period. Next spring they can be planted in the desired place.



Photo: Neil Hepworth/RHS



Photo: Handyman magazine



Photo: Rural Sprout



## LOCATION AND IDEAL CONDITIONS FOR YOUR PLANTS TO THRIVE

When deciding where your plant will go, you should **take into account several factors**: height and size of the adult plant, solar conditions, microclimate, soil and water. Plants have different desires when it comes to these factors and people too. If you want to maximize the space available, you should sort the plants by height and place them in ascending order to the north (see picture).

You can also put your plants in the shade of another plant or tree or in partial shade if the plants can tolerate or prefer this condition. **Microclimate** is defined as a small zone that has a different climate due to its surroundings. Some examples are the space in front of the south-facing wall which will be quite warm, or a pit sheltered from the sun will be a wet and colder microclimate.

Microclimate is important to take into account as this can increase or decrease your growing zone. By thinking about microclimates, you can maximize the diversity of your garden. If your plant has taken roots but it is not planted yet, you can do this before or after the worst heat of the summer.

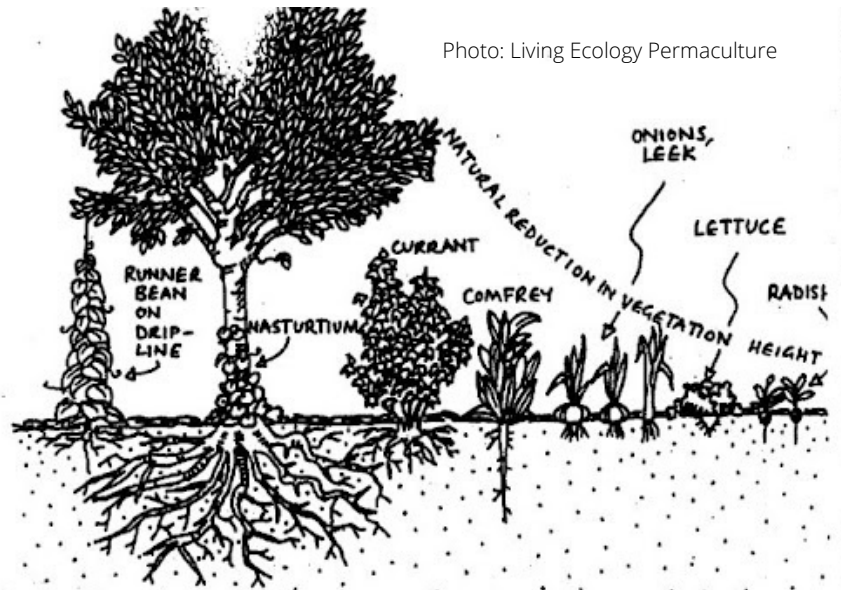


Photo: Living Ecology Permaculture

*Here the fruit tree forms the centre of a small 'guild' of related plants, using every vertical layer of the garden as space for yield. The careful choice of species makes the plants mutually beneficial.*

Once the plant is set in the ground, it is important to water it well and reduce the growth of weeds around it. You can do this by **mulching** (applying an organic or inorganic material) around the plant to cover the soil. It will reduce evaporation, fertilize the soil slowly and lead to a healthy soil. **Then you're done! Let the plant grow for another season and you can take new cuttings from it.**

### MATERIALS

**To take softwood cuttings you need:** pots, a well-drained material such as sand or perlite, a transparent material you can use as a moisture barrier, garden shears, and water.

**To take hardwood cuttings you only need:** garden shears, earth, water and potentially deep pots.

### SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

For more information on which shrubs are propagated by which type of cutting or you want to know more about the theory behind cutting propagation see [here](#) and [here](#).