

## Book Review: *Guide to Pruning*

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Some time back, I lamented I know of no single resource that comprehensively set out the basics of pruning and how to care for specific plants. It was at the 2005 Davidson Horticultural Symposium XXI, I purchased Cass Turnbull's *Guide to Pruning: What, When, Where & How to Prune for a More Beautiful Garden*. This soft cover book was the resource I pined for and has become one of my most helpful books. It stands on that special shelf in my horticultural library to which I return and return, next to *The Southern Living Garden Book* and Rodale's *Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs*, among others. It's that kind of book.

Author Cass Turnbull is founder of PlantAmnesty, an organization committed to putting a stop to malpruning by providing accurate information about pruning and garden maintenance. For more than twenty years, Turnbull has gardened professionally in Seattle, Washington.

*Guide to Pruning* is easy to read, simple and very repetitive. If by the book's end, you haven't grasped the basic pruning concepts drilled over and over by Turnbull's discourse—well, I'm sorry to say, you needn't be handling sharp instruments like pruning shears! The simplicity and repetition of the writing may rip and tear at you early in the book, but as you progress through its 226 pages, the basics of pruning will become clear-cut in your mind—as clean as the cut of a new pruning saw. This is Turnbull's plan—to repeat the essentials over and over until they are plainly, distinctly and unmistakably internalized. Then, just when you think you have got it, the author distills the information further, summarizing at the end of every chapter.

The early chapters comprehensively cover the basics: basic heading cuts, both non-selective and selective, and basic thinning cuts. The short chapter on Selective Pruning Techniques is priceless. Here Turnbull covers the pruning budgets of plants, plant habits and mature size versus ultimate size. Did you realize the *mature size* of a plant is the size a plant will grow in about ten years, but its *ultimate size* is roughly twice what is suggested on the plant tag?

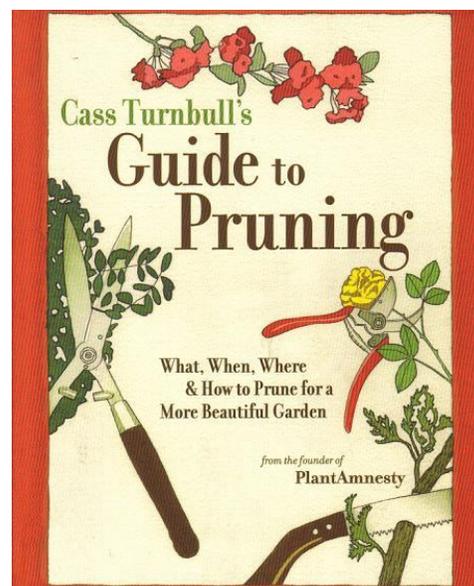
Timing is also addressed. *People make too big a deal about timing. If you are pruning the right way, and in moderation, anytime is the right time to prune* (38), writes Turnbull. The bold statement applies to pruning in general. The author, however pert, does not fail to address the timing of selective pruning to bloomers—plants, not unruly undergarments, that is!

Diagrams and drawings by Kate Allen illustrate each major point covered in the text. So, if the words fail to evoke understanding, perhaps the drawings will help you see.

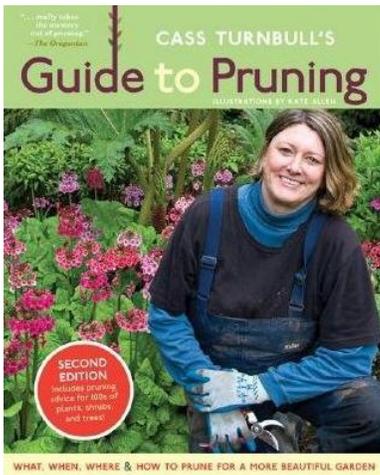
Turnbull recommends only three pruning tools, but insists each should be high quality and expensive: Felco 2 hand pruners (and holster), Felco 60 pruning saw, and a pair of good, wood-handled loppers with rubber lopper bumper. Spend some money on these three tools, she says, and then take care of them!

The second part of the book, comprising the most pages, covers five genres of plants: Mounding-habit Shrubs, Cane-growing Shrubs, Tree-like Shrubs, Vines and Trees. Turnbull's major point goes something like this: the growth habit of the plant determines how (and when) it should be pruned. After a thorough discussion of the general growth habit of these five plant types, list upon list of specific plants within each genre follow, which includes specific information on how a given plant grows, how to prune it and how it will respond. It is this portion of the book that establishes it as a valuable research tool—allowing the thoughtful gardener to look up a specific plant and review its growth and pruning necessities.

As you dig deeper into the book, reading about the growing habits and pruning requirements of specific plants, you will begin to realize—*I've read this material before!* Through this recognition, you will appreciate you've internalized and learned the basic cuts and how to apply these to five classes of plants. Herein is the real strength of the book.



By the book's end, you will likely feel enlightened, reasonably informed and a good deal more confident when pruning. After reading, I walked outside into the garden and somehow, in a way I can't fully explain, I felt more loved by my plants. But hey, you'll have to work out your own relationship with your plants.



The 2004 edition and updated second edition dated December 22, 2005 are currently available used and new at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and through other book sellers (ISBN-10 1570614682; ISBN-13 978-1570614682). DMC

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