

Hand Pruner Selection in the Landscape

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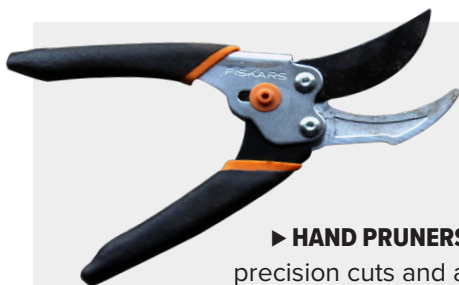
What is the Proper Hand Pruner?

We always stress “right plant, right place” when selecting plant material for our landscapes. We also must be cognizant of selecting the right pruner for the right plant, and even that might not be specific enough.

Different pruners are used for different plants, and different cuts within the same plant will necessitate different types of hand pruners. Here is a snapshot of some of the different options.

Types of Pruners

There are a variety of pruners for different applications. The specific application will depend on the plant type, and within the plant, the type of cut to make. For finer cuts, one might elect to use more precision-based pruners (i.e. bypass pruners), whereas rougher cuts (such as for thicker woody stems) may require a pruning saw. For plants in hedges (such as boxwoods or yaupon hollies) or ornamental grasses (such as switchgrass), hedge shears may be appropriate for trimming. Remember, these are styles of pruning equipment for use by hand, but electric, gas and/or extended-hand (pole) versions are often available.



► **HAND PRUNERS:** Hand pruners allow precision cuts and are often reserved for severing shoots and stems that are up to 3/4 of an inch. Two popular options include **bypass pruners** and **anvil pruners**. Bypass pruners bear **two** curved, sharp blades that will overlap when making cuts; anvil pruners have **one** curved sharp blade that clamps down upon a flat blade (or anvil) that is not sharp. Bypass pruners are better suited to precision cuts, offering a cleaner cut; however, they may be more liable to jam than anvil pruners as the blades overlap in a scissor-like fashion. Anvil pruners are less likely to jam, as there are no overlapping parts; however, they provide a rougher cut that can crush stems. They are good for situations such as removing cumbersome dead stems but bad for situations where you want a gentler cut (i.e. living plant material).

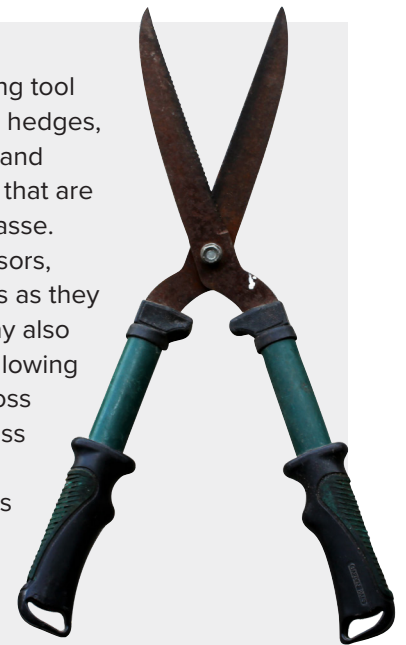


► **LOPPING SHEARS:** For branches that are too large for hand pruners (greater than 3/4 of an inch), but not quite large enough to necessitate curved pruning saws (less than 1 1/2 inches), loppers offer the leverage and the precision to cuts. With the same bypass or anvil cutting mechanisms as the smaller hand tool counterparts, lopping shears provide a longer handle to access hard-to-reach areas and provide more force to make cuts on medium-sized shoots and stems.



► **CURVED PRUNING SAW:** A curved pruning saw would be ideal for cutting woody branches that are of thicker diameter (greater than 1 1/2 inch in diameter), such as lateral branches on woody trees and shrubs. The curvature of the blade allows for a more ergonomic cut, as pruning cuts on plant material in congested areas may need more elbow room to get the job done. The sawtooth orientation allows a cutting motion to be accomplished via rocking back and forth, compared to the shears described below which involve a closing/cutting mechanism between blades.

► **HEDGE SHEARS:** This type of cutting tool is commonly used to create formal hedges, as often observed with boxwoods and other shrubs such as yaupon holly that are trained into geometric forms en masse. Hedge shears resemble large scissors, effectively serving similar purposes as they slice vegetation. Hedge shears may also be used for ornamental grasses, allowing a neat trim at a uniform height across the individual blades of certain grass species' foliage. The long cutting blades are able to chop large areas of growth with relative ease.



All photos by Damon Abdi

Planning, Care and Maintenance

Before pruning in the landscape, make sure that the timing is appropriate for the species in question. Refer to LSU AgCenter publication [P3869 Best Practices for Pruning Ornamental Trees in the Landscape](#) for more information on where and when to make cuts for a variety of landscape plants. It is good practice to ensure blades are sharp since dull blades create poor cut quality and may invite disease. Sharpening blades regularly using the proper tools (depends on manufacturer but can include custom files or other specialty tools) should be done periodically to ensure a sharp surface. In order to limit disease, sanitizing pruners is a best management practice. Refer to LSU AgCenter publication [P3887 Sanitizing Tools to Prevent Disease](#) for more information on using household items to maintain disease-free tools.

Summary

Selecting the right tool for a job is a primary consideration in all aspects of landscaping; however, for the vitality and health of the plant material, this is especially warranted when it comes to pruning. Understanding what plant material (species) you are maintaining, what **specific** cuts need to be made on a plant and deciding upon the proper tool is a best management practice for a healthy landscape.

Selected References

<https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/guide-pruning-equipment>

<https://extension.umd.edu/resource/pruning-tools>

For more information on selecting the right tools for the job, please contact your local LSU AgCenter Extension office or visit www.LSUAgCenter.com.



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