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You know the **beginning of spring** is upon us when the **bright cheery Forsythia** begin to bloom around town. These hardy shrubs are great as accent plants or hedges. There are several varieties of Forsythia, ranging from dwarf ground covers to the upright hedge varieties. One of my personal favorites is **Magical Gold**. This breathtaking shrub grows to 4 5 feet tall and has much larger blooms than the other varieties.

The first signs of the Forsythia blooming are also Mother Nature's way of letting us know that it is **time to prune**. Pruning is an important garden task, but because it is so permanent it can seem daunting to many gardeners. So why don't we discuss the basics of pruning!



### Reasons To Prune

1. To Maintain the Health of Your Plant
2. To Direct Growth
3. To Remove Undesirable Growth
4. To Increase Quality or Yield of Flowers or Fruit
5. To Maintain Safety

Because many kinds of pruning cuts are made near a growth bud, it is essential to understand the different types of growth buds in order to help you decide where to make the cuts.

1. **Terminal Bud** Grows at the tip of a shoot.
2. **Lateral Bud** Grows along the sides of the shoot of a leaf attachment. They produce sideways growth.
3. **Latent Bud** These buds lie dormant beneath the bark.

### Four Types of Pruning Cuts:

1. **Thinning** Many of the cuts made when pruning are thinning cuts. Such cuts can direct growth, eliminate competing or old stems, reduce overall size, and open up a plant's structure.
  - a. To thin, you remove an entire branch or stem, taking it back to its point of origin or to its junction with another branch. You might cut a branch back to the trunk, to the parent branch from which it arose, or all the way to the ground.
2. **Heading** Heading cuts remove just a part of a stem or branch – not the whole thing, as thinning cuts do. Such cuts can be made back to a bud or to a twig or branch too small to take over the terminal role. Heading stimulates the growth of lateral buds just below the cut.
3. **Shearing** An indiscriminate form of heading, shearing does not involve careful precise cutting just above a growing point. Instead, you clip a plant's outer foliage to create an even surface, as in hedges or topiary.
4. **Pinching** This is the simplest of pruning cuts. Using your thumb and forefinger or a pair of hand shears, you nip off the tips of new growth, removing the terminal bud. This stops the shoot from growing longer and stimulates branching. Pinching is primarily used on annuals, perennials and houseplants to encourage bushy growth and more flowering.

Keep in mind that we didn't mention topping. **Topping** is when you cut off the entire top of a tree. This is **extremely bad** for the tree and causes instability in the growth structure as well as a rapid growth of water sprouts and suckers.



If you are interested in learning more about pruning, visit one of our horticultural experts for a quick lesson or come to our **April 4th Seminar at 10:00 The Finer Points of Pruning**

