What Pruning Tools Should I Have?

Dale Odorizzi, Lanark County Master Gardeners



There are many tools for pruning available on the market. Hand pruners can range in price from $60+, down to $10. The most important thing to look for is how do these tools feel in my hand. If you have a lot of pruning to do, you may want to buy the heavy-duty tools that professionals use. Cheap tools are really no bargain as you will end up replacing them after little use. Power tools are making many improvements and now, many are powered by a rechargeable battery, so you don't have to worry about a long extension cord or having sufficient gasoline to power them.

There is also good news for left-handed folks. Increasingly, tools are being built for them. You may have to look but they are available.

You do not need to have a tool shed full of pruning equipment to handle your pruning needs. A few basic tools should do the job.

Clippers and Loppers



Hand Clippers are the main tool for home gardeners. I never went into my yard without my hand clippers in my pocket. Clippers come in 2 styles:

- Scissor type where the two blades cross.
- Anvil type where the two blades meet.

The choice is yours. It is a matter of personal preference.

Lopers are like clippers but with long handles so you can reach farther up into your tree or shrub without needing to get out the ladder.

Saws

For heavier work, you will need a pruning saw. Look for a saw with fine teeth for smooth work and coarser teeth for large limbs. You will likely need one of each to get the job done. There are:

- Pole saws that give you extra reach while standing securely on the ground.
- Curved blade saw which is ideal for gardeners with light to average amounts of pruning. I like to look for one that has replacement blades as sharpening the teeth is time consuming. The narrow blade makes it easy to get into the plant if necessary.
- Chain saws are useful for removing trees or large branches. They make a rough cut and are difficult to control. Safety equipment is essential when using these beasts. I leave that to the pros. Smaller battery operated saws are a great choice for homeowners.

Shearing Equipment

Shearing is a form of pruning that involves removing soft new growth. It is done primarily to dwarf trees, shape hedges or to develop formal topiary. When shearing, you are not cutting any heavy wood so you will need different equipment.

- Machetes and knives are light weight and fast and easy to use. They are inexpensive and easy to use but they are dangerous so choose and use wisely.
- Electric saw, if you have a large hedge to care for, electric shears are worth the investment. They now come in battery powered forms and can be small and lightweight.
- Hedge Shears are safe, durable, easy to control and inexpensive. They are adequate for most shearing jobs, are easily sharpened and require little muscle power.

I reached out to my brother, Kim Allen for his input as he has a house on a large, treed lot and a cottage surrounded by many trees. He does have a traditional chainsaw but also a battery-operated pruner that easily cuts larger branches. He also uses a saw that attaches to the end of his string trimmer giving him about an 11 foot reach.



Keep your pruning tools well-oiled and rust free. As you can see from these tools, I do not always practice what I preach.





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