

## Pruning Blueberry Bushes Young & Old

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Blueberry bushes should be pruned every year to produce high yields of good quality fruit. Prune the plants when they are fully dormant during the late winter or early spring (January through March).

For the first two years after planting, simply remove any dead branches and all weak, spindly growth. Do not over prune young bushes. During the early stages of plant development you want a good root system and plant crown to become established; heavy pruning of young plants can delay this process. A productive, well-managed blueberry plant should have 5-10 healthy, vigorous, upright canes which range in age from one to six years old. To achieve this follow the steps below for all plants that have been established for three years or more.

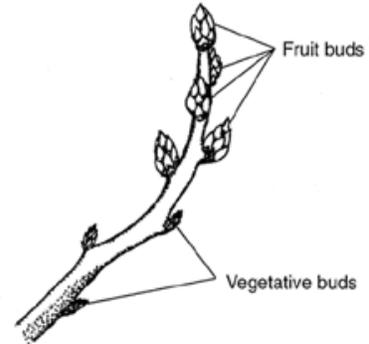


Figure 1. Types of buds on a blueberry shoot

1. Prune out any weak, low-growing or diseased canes.
2. Prune out any canes that are more than six years old (these are usually the thickest canes, which are gray in color with peeling bark). Blueberry canes tend to be less productive once they are more than six years old and should be pruned out in favor of younger, more productive canes. Cut the old canes back to ground level unless new cane growth has been sparse; in which case, leave a four- to eight-inch stub above the ground. New canes may sprout from these stubs.
3. Thin the remaining canes, leaving those with the most vigorous shoot growth (long, thick branches with good fruit buds). Leave six to seven vigorous two- to five-year-old canes and two or three one-year-old canes per bush. A mature blueberry plant should have six to ten healthy canes varying in age from one to six years old.
4. Remove any weak fruiting branches on the remaining canes, especially those less than six inches in length. Most fruit is produced on vigorous one-year-old shoots on healthy two- to five-year-old canes. The fruit buds on these shoots are large and teardrop-shaped. Each bud will produce a cluster of five to eight flowers. The shoots also have smaller, pointed vegetative buds that will produce leaves (Figure 1).

Old, neglected bushes that have not been pruned for years can be renovated by pruning out  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the oldest canes (tallest, thickest) per year during the dormant season, for each of the next three to four years. In this way, by the end of four years, all of the old canes will have been removed while new canes have now had four years to become established and productive, resulting in no loss of yield over the renovation, and improved yield and fruit quality by the end of the process.

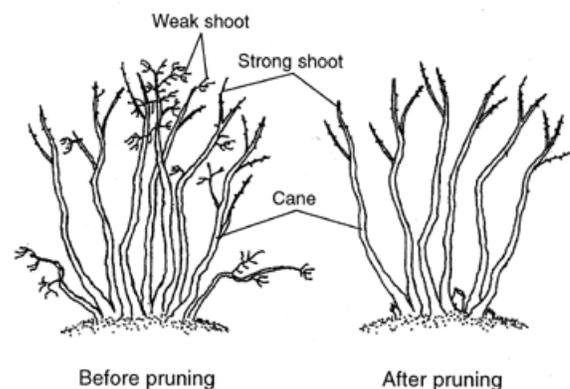


Figure 2. Dormant blueberry pruning