

Welcome to my weekly series!

ASK THE LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONAL

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 25 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects.

I have a beautiful holly bush that has gotten away from me and grown to be ungainly and way too large. How can I prune it down to a more reasonable size and shape without putting it into shock or killing it? Margie



Hi Margie,

The best time to do this type of pruning is between May and August so new growth will fill in the plant; I would recommend that you wait until next year. You can safely prune the holly by 1/3 without shocking it, both 1/3 of the height and 1/3 of the width. Use sharp hand pruners and loppers. Do not prune with hedge trimmers! Using hedge trimmers creates a plant that is very thick and tangled...a perfect place for insects and disease. This is important: Make sure you prune out any crossing branches (which there will be many). This will help make the holly look better and allow air circulation within the shrub. All the branches should be coming out straight from the main stem out to the branch tips. Remove any thin, hanging branches. Raise the bottom branches up off the ground by 6-8" to allow for air circulation within the plant. Do not be afraid to prune, this plant will grow back very well. By the time you are finished, it should not look like the holly you started out with. You should be able to see through it. If you can't see through it, prune some more. After this initial pruning, it should be easy to do touch-up pruning at least once/year. Good Luck.

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