

# ask

## the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs



### Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest.

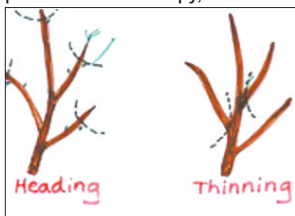
Email or mail your questions to: [info@sprigsandtwigs.net](mailto:info@sprigsandtwigs.net) or Linda Lillie, Sprigs & Twigs Inc, PO Box 245, Gales Ferry, CT 06335

**Question of the Week:** *We rent our house and back in the spring our tenants hired someone to "prune" our beautiful azaleas like you can see in the picture. What's your reaction?*

To be honest, when I see these over-enthusiastic pruning jobs with shrubs pruned into "meatballs" and "tuna cans" they are pruning atrocities that make me ill. In your case, STOP your tenants and their "landscaper" from touching your shrubs and contact me later this fall or in the spring. If you have a high-maintenance English-style, formal garden, this type of pruning is appropriate, otherwise it's not.

All plants have a "natural growth habit" and although some of them naturally grow into meatball shapes, most don't. When shrubs are pruned, it matters WHERE they are pruned, because cutting in different spots on the plant causes the plant to react differently. In general, wherever you prune, the plant is stimulated to grow more. If the tip of a twig that contains the terminal bud is cut, the buds below that point will be highly stimulated to grow and "thicken" the plant. That is called "heading pruning".

If you are looking to reduce the size of a shrub or to "guide" where it is growing, you will be doing what is called "thinning pruning". In this case you remove the entire branch back where it started along the main trunk or stem. This type of pruning doesn't stimulate growth as much as "heading pruning", although as light penetrates the canopy, new shoots may be initiated which will need to be thinned.



A variation of thinning pruning is "renewal pruning". This works especially well on shrubs like old, leggy lilacs. In this case, Sprigs & Twigs uses thinning cuts to remove about 1/3 of the older wood each year for three years. This approach maintains the overall shape of the shrub while reducing its volume and height over time.

At Sprigs & Twigs, we encounter many situations where a shrub is totally out-of-control and needs to be "rejuvenation pruned". This looks more drastic than it is, but it is an effective way to restore a healthy shrub and stimulate it to send up new shoots and grow back into your landscape. Not all shrubs are good candidates for rejuvenation pruning and sometimes replacement is the best course of action.

If you value your landscape and you want to prune yourself, get the proper equipment, learn about pruning techniques or hire someone you are absolutely certain knows what they are doing. Your neighbors will appreciate it and you will avoid years of recovery from poorly done pruning.

Sprigs & Twigs is considering offering a pruning class at our Gales Ferry office sometime in the upcoming months if there is enough interest. Contact our office if you would like to attend.

# Sprigs & Twigs

Linda K. Lillie is the President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc, the premier landscape tree care & lawn care company in SE Connecticut for the last 17 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation work.

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