

## Pruning Time

Well, spring has definitely sprung here in the Mojave Desert. As you look around your landscape, you may notice things looking a little "out of control". Pruning your desert plants is a part of ornamental landscape care. I would like to pass on some very useful tips from the Arizona Municipal Water Users Association.



### REDUCING THE NEED TO PRUNE

1. Plant the right plant in the right place. Select plants with the mature height, width and shape in mind. Don't try to make a plant fit in an area that is too small. Give it space to grow naturally.
2. Select plants that are low-water-use and well-adapted to our desert conditions.
3. Water properly to reduce excess growth. Most plants are opportunists and will take-up any extra watering, resulting in overgrowth. Seasonally adjust your watering frequency to reduce the need to prune.
4. Avoid fertilizing too much or too often. It creates excess growth. Many of our desert-adapted plants do not require any fertilizing at all.

### PRUNING METHODS

1. Do-Nothing Method: "Do no (pruning) harm" is usually the best method of care for your plants. Only prune to remove dead or diseased wood. This is particularly true for plants in the ground for less than three years. Over time, most shrubs and especially trees will develop into attractive and healthy plants when left alone. This method only works if the four items above are followed.
2. Two-Step Method for Shrubs: Use to control size yet maintain natural shape. Shrub pruning should not be done more than once or twice a year. Step one: Cut back branches and stems to a half-globe shape. Step two: Cut every other branch back (approximately 6 to 9 inches) to the first large "fork" on the branch or where the branch splits into a "V" shape. This opens the interior to sunlight and produces an informal or natural look.
3. Selective Pruning Method for Trees: Do not prune trees planted less than 3 years ago, except to remove dead, crossing or broken branches. Carefully selected branches and stems are cut back near a supporting branch. No more than 25 percent of a tree's canopy should be removed in any given year. Shearing, stubbing, flush cuts, heading or topping can cause many long-term problems and are not recommended.
4. Renewal Method: This method is used for many small shrubs, perennials, ornamental grasses, and frost damaged shrubs, groundcovers, and vines. Severe cut back after the growing season or just prior to new growth in the spring. Frost damaged plants should not be cut back until after danger of any further frost. Severe pruning should be avoided during the hot summer months.
5. Dead Heading: During blooming, cut off dead blooms on perennials and small shrubs. When the blooming season is done, cut back stems for the next cycle of new growth and bloom. For ornamental grasses, cut each bunch flat, 6 inches from the ground in January or after the blooms have dried.

"The hardest thing to understand in the world is the income tax."  
 — Albert Einstein

## FAVORITE FLORA:

### CALLISTEMON VIMINALIS 'LITTLE JOHN' - DWARF BOTTLEBRUSH



Common around Las Vegas in both homeowner's yards and resort properties alike, the Dwarf Bottlebrush (*Callistemon viminalis* 'Little John') is a great low growing shrub. The Dwarf Bottlebrush grows to about 2-4 feet tall and wide forming a dense mound of woody stems and 3 inch long gray-green leaves. Bristly deep red flowers adorn this plant year round but are at the best from early summer through fall. The genus was named using the Greek words 'kallos' meaning "beautiful" and 'stemon' meaning "stamens" reference the long striking and colorful bristles that characterize the flowers of this plant and others of the genus. This native to Australia is slow growing and drought tolerant once established. It is best grown in full sun to partial shade conditions. A

hard freeze can damage this plant and pruning may be required to remove damaged branch tips. Otherwise, the Dwarf Bottlebrush is a low maintenance shrub only requiring pruning to control its shape and size when desired. Callistemon's may become chlorotic (yellowing of the leaves due to insufficient chlorophyll production) in the Las Vegas Valley. This can be treated easily and with good response with chelated iron fertilizers.

This shrub is great for low borders and as a foundation plant. It can also be used in containers and to drape over retaining walls. This Callistemon pairs well with tropical and evergreen plants but can also be used with desert species. Combine this shrub with other Australian natives such as Emu Bush (*Eremophila racemosa* 'Easter Egg'), Knifeleaf Acacia (*Acacia cultiformis*) and the Silver Dollar Tree (*Eucalyptus cinerea*) for your own down under oasis.

### Photo of the Month

Days End  
 Huntington Beach, CA  
 Hazem El Sisi

