

M. Richards



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GARDENER'S REFERENCE

WISTERIA PRUNING

Visitors often ask how gardeners at Filoli maintain control on the size of Filoli's wisteria and get such magnificent clouds of blossoms. Contrary to the common temptation to water and fertilize heavily, the key to abundant blooms on a healthy wisteria is actually careful seasonal pruning and training; wisterias are drought tolerant plants that enjoy full sun and excellent drainage, and rarely suffer from nutrient deficiencies. To prune effectively, each vine must be approached with an understanding of appropriate branch spacing and how a plant will likely react to each cut, an artistic eye, a concept of the desired growth form (see fig. 1) and also the flexibility to work with the plant's natural habit.

When pruning wisteria, Filoli's horticulturists keep their tool kits stocked with clean, sharp pruners and hand saws, extension pole pruners and ladders when needed, and appropriate ties to hold vines in place. Wind can damage even small vines, and as they grow, large branches can break under their own weight, so main scaffold branches are secured to supports. Thereafter, ties are checked annually and replaced as needed or moved to prevent girdling. The strength of supports themselves, such as arbors, should be considered carefully, and assessed regularly with age; mature vines can become heavy, collapsing inadequate structures. At Filoli, visitors can see various cultivars of Chinese, Silky and Japanese wisterias (*Wisteria sinensis*, *W. brachybotrys*, and *W. floribunda*, respectively) grown in multiple forms, including bonsai, standard tree, on walls and as shrubs, together with their appropriate supports.

controlling size and form, and encouraging blooms on mature wisterias. As vines grow, monthly summer pruning (from June to September in California) is used to shorten twining, stray whips—the current season's new growth—back to the extent of the desired canopy. This keeps the vine compact and tamed, while encouraging an abundance of flowering spurs the next season.

Water sprouts and suckers should be removed promptly. Suckers are rootstock from below the graft union, and can decrease the vigor of, or overwhelm, the desired flowering plant. Make these removal cuts back to a branch collar—the ring of tissue where growth attaches to a trunk or branch—to avoid leaving nubs, and

Maintaining Established Vines

Summer. Summer pruning is the most important process for

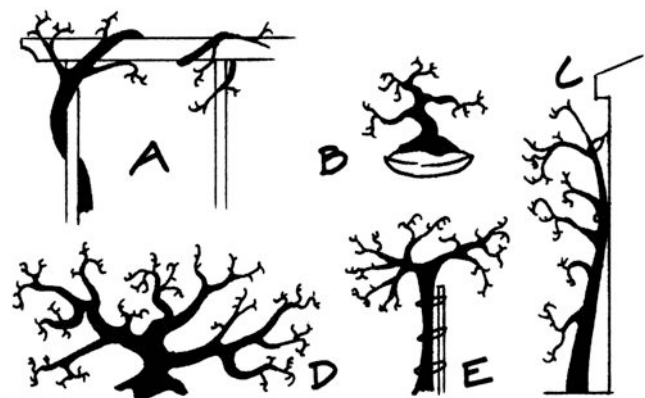


Fig. 1. Common Growth Forms: (A) Arbor, (B) Bonsai, (C) Wall-trained, (D) Shrub, (E) Standard

NOV	
OCT	
SEP	SUMMER PRUNE
AUG	
JUL	
JUN	
MAY	
APR	BLOOM
MAR	
FEB	WINTER PRUNE
JAN	
DEC	

to ensure that cuts heal properly.

Occasionally, it is necessary to save and begin training a new whip to replace an old, dying or unattractive branch. These are headed back to a node, directly above a bud, leaving a minimum of two to three buds. Longer whips can be trained as necessary if, for instance, they are needed to reach the top of an arbor.

Winter. Winter pruning occurs when branches are bare of leaves. This is the time for general clean-up, while the plant's structure is visible. Gardeners simply remove dead, diseased and unwanted growth. We also remove any remaining water sprouts at this time, check ties and supports, and continue training as necessary.

Mature and Untended Vines

Summer. Old, gnarled, tangled vines can pose a daunting task and can rarely be restored to tidy, picture-perfect specimens. Instead, seasonal pruning should focus on working with the beauty of their gnarled, crowded character and encouraging fuller blooms. In summer, this is as simple as heading back whips to the extent of the desired canopy. Already, this helps to limit the vine's size and will encourage greater numbers of blooms the next season; summer pruning encourages spurs to form below the pruning cut.

Winter. In winter, when the branching structure is exposed, simply removing dead and diseased wood can reduce some of the tangle. Some young, flexible branches may be carefully untangled to make the mess more approachable. Remove all suckers, water sprouts and unwanted whips, bearing in mind that you may wish to save some as replacements for older branches or to form a new part of the canopy. Step back often

and look at the entire plant before making big decisions.

Of the whips pruned back during the summer months, you may wish to shorten these even farther—to two or three buds—further controlling the vine's size, and increasing the density of flowering shoots. With some of the 'fluff' removed, begin looking for main trunks and scaffold branches, and remove some larger limbs that are too crowded or that project too far from the desired canopy. Ideal branch spacing is about 12 inches, but this is difficult to achieve in a plant that is not carefully trained from the beginning. It is wise to spread a number of larger cuts over several years, to avoid a vigorous sprouting response that will be hard to control the following year. This also minimizes the number of large, unsightly pruning cuts that can leave vines vulnerable to fungus and disease.

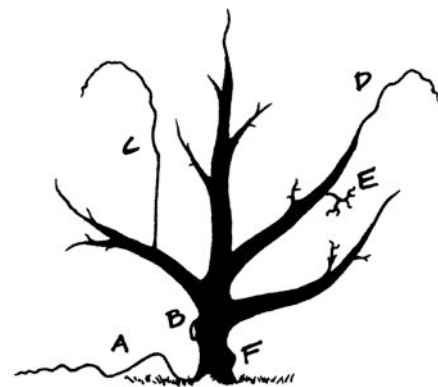


Fig 2. Common Pruning Terminology:
(A) Sucker, (B) Stub, (C) Watersprout, (D) Whip,
(E) Spurs, (F) Graft Union

References & Further reading:

Tolmach, L. (1994). Wisteria Pruning Demystified. *The Sundial Times*, 3, 1-2.
Valder, P. (1995). Wisterias: A comprehensive Guide. Portland: Timber Press.

Filoli Gardener's Reference sheets are created by garden staff to answer common questions regarding Filoli's traditional horticultural practices. This sheet may be accessed from the Filoli website.

FILOLI CENTER, 86 CAÑADA ROAD, WOODSIDE, CA 94062
(650) 364-8300 WWW.FILOLI.ORG