



# Millais Nurseries

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## PRUNING ADVICE LEAFLET

Our rule of thumb is that if you can cut a branch with secateurs then prune straight after flowering, but if significant pruning and a saw is required, then do so from February to March.

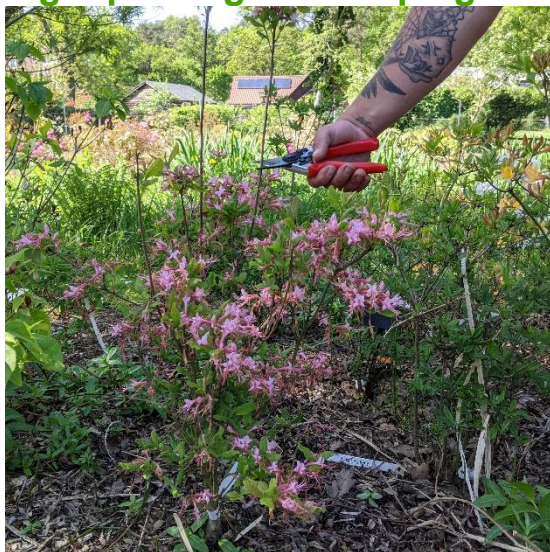
### Formative shaping



*Pinch out single shoots, leave the double shoots above the leaf whorl.*

On young rhododendrons, or those which are looking a bit sparse, we recommend pinching out single growth buds as they start to swell to encourage multiple branching. This will ensure that your plant retains a nice bushy shape. Simply snap out the leading growth bud at each whorl of leaves as they start to expand. Instead of one lanky shoot, you should gain 3-4 bushy shoots from the buds above the leaf petioles, each of which can support flowers the next season. If there are already several shoots above the whorl, then it is usually best leave them alone.

### Light pruning and shaping



*Prune wayward long shoots straight after flowering.*

Any light pruning that you can do with a pair of secateurs is normally best straight after flowering. Enjoy the flowers before pruning off any lanky shoots to encourage bushy growth lower down. Prune straight after flowering so the plant has time to grow new shoots and form flower buds for next season. Longer shoots from the previous year can also be pruned back to a whorl to encourage bushy growth. Vigorous shoots on Azaleas may benefit from a trim. Simply snip these taller branches back to a natural plateau so that the plant grows into a nice natural shape but try to avoid creating a 'pom-pom' effect.

## Heavy pruning and coppicing

What about large established Rhododendrons? Perhaps you have a plant that is out of control and creeping across a drive, or simply elderly and past its best. Sometimes radical coppicing is required, but this will open up a large hole in the landscape, so give it some careful thought first. We have successfully rejuvenated ancient specimens at Crosswater Farm Gardens, particularly after recent snow damage.



*Rhododendron Songbird. 3 months, 12 months, and 24 months after pruning in March.*

The best time to carry out heavy pruning is in February-March when the plant has plenty of energy after the winter, and just before the sap rises in the spring. Be prepared to lose the flowers for a year (or two), but the re-growth will be much better, and you should gain a healthy and bushy looking plant. Unfortunately, there are no half measures, and it is best to cut hard back almost to stumps, so that growth starts low down to create a bushy plant from ground level. If possible, leave a few green shoots to help draw the sap up through the plant.



*No half measures. Prune back hard to marked positions. Remove any damaged branches.*

We have successfully cut back Rhododendrons that were well over 3m tall to stumps about 60-90cm above the ground. A good woodchipper makes light work of all the branches and leaves, and the chips can be directed back on the ground as a useful mulch. New growth starts from dormant buds below the cut, forcing their way through the

old trunks during May and early June. This spring period is a critical time to ensure your plant is well fed, mulched, and given plenty of water. Over the next couple of years, a dense and vigorous new bush will be formed from ground level.



*Rhododendron coppiced hard, leaving a few green leaves. New shoots emerging in June.*

Another option is to coppice half the plant one year, and the remaining trunks the next year, but in some ways, this prolongs the process.



*This plant had been well over 4 metres tall. Picture shows new growth with a few flower buds after one season. By the following season, all the stumps were hidden.*

Heavy coppicing can rejuvenate most Rhododendrons and give them a new lease of life. It improves the health of old plants because the roots will have less canopy to support. Sometimes new growth is so vigorous that additional pruning of long shoots may be needed during the summer to prevent them being snapped off by strong winds.

As a final word of caution, do not ignore the beauty of some old tree like rhododendrons with wonderful gnarled old trunks and a high canopy of flower. You should also be aware that weak growing plants with few leaves, and species with smooth bark typically do not respond well to coppicing. You have been warned!