

- **Can I prune my Skimmia into the "woods" (woody part) to reduce the height?**

Skimmia japonica is a small to medium sized, hardy, evergreen shrub with fragrant flowers in the spring. They are a prized shrub for those areas where they can grow in deep shade or will not be exposed to anything stronger than a little dappled sunshine. They are slow growing and naturally compact and rounded in form but can occasionally have errant shoots or become a little overgrown and out of shape. They can be pruned but the pruning should err on the conservative side.

To prepare for pruning make sure that pruners are *sharp* and disinfected with a mild chlorine bleach solution of one part bleach to ten parts water (add bleach to the water not water to the bleach. This will minimize the risk of splashing undiluted bleach onto your skin or clothes). The bleach solution is effective for disinfecting for about 15 minutes so only make a small amount at a time. I find it useful to use a wide mouth mason jar or any rinsed-out jar for this purpose. Soak the pruners for 5-10 minutes then rinse with clean water and dry with paper towel or a clean cloth. It is good practice to disinfect again before using on any other plant and this will help to prevent the transmission of bacteria, fungi or viruses between the various plants in your garden.

When pruning your *Skimmia*, the first thing to consider is removal of any dead, diseased or damaged parts of the plant. This can be done at any time of the year and should be done as soon as possible after the problem is noticed. If anything appears diseased then trim it out first and sanitize the pruners again before proceeding to any other part of the shrub. You can wipe the pruners with an alcohol wipe or spray with Lysol instead of using the bleach solution again. Clear up thoroughly under and around the shrub and dispose of diseased parts in the garbage, not in the compost.

Shoots that spoil the shape of the shrub can be trimmed in the spring when the flowering is finished. Trim just above a leaf node or branch joint, well within the bush to hide the cut. Additional, *conservative* pruning can be performed at this time to regain the natural shape. Fertilize with a blood/bonemeal mix, a seaweed solution, sea soil or a good quality compost to encourage new, healthy growth after pruning.

If the shrub is old and very woody it is better to replace it than attempt to perform a hard pruning to renovate it. *Skimmia* does not respond well to drastic pruning.

Sources:

‘Royal Horticultural Society Pruning and Training’ by Christopher Brickell and David Joyce

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/skimmia/growing-guide>

My own garden