

## **Prune Like a Pro: Ninebark 2022**



**TITLE:** Prune Like a Pro: Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)

**Description:** Ninebark is a cane shrub native to the eastern and central regions of North America. Pruning ninebark keeps these shrubs a manageable size, as they grow quite quickly. Trimming can also help prevent some diseases and enhance the shrub's appearance.

**Objective(s):** Learn when, and how to prune Ninebark in a way that fits your landscape.

**WHAT:** Fast-growing shrubs like Ninebark need annual pruning to maintain their health. Pruning is done to increase airflow and sunlight into the shrub. The flowers of Ninebark are small and short-lived, but they develop berries that the birds love. Some people have Ninebark for the colorful leaves, others for the flowers and berries. Almost everyone who grows it chooses it for the exfoliating bark, which is how it got its common name. Depending on where your Ninebark is growing, you may be pruning for shape, and perhaps for size (less likely).

**WHY:** Ninebark shrubs are susceptible to powdery mildew, a common fungus. Pruning Ninebark for increased airflow and sunlight reduces the susceptibility to powdery mildew.

**WHEN:** Pruning for overall health is done while the Ninebark is dormant, in late winter. Pruning for size and shape is done shortly after flowering, but no later than Labor Day (in east TN). Renovation pruning – when you have purchased property with overgrown Ninebark, is done in late winter while the Ninebark is dormant.

**WHERE:** One of the advantages of ninebark shrubs is their ability to thrive in harsh conditions. These shrubs grow best in soil that is average but slightly acidic. However, they can also handle alkaline soils. They grow best in full sun. Well-drained soils are ideal for ninebark shrubs, though they can also handle dry and wet soils. Ninebark is also a safe species to grow near black walnut trees, the toxins of which kill many other plants and crops in their vicinity.

### **HOW:**

- Routine dormant pruning is focused on
  - removing weak, spindly canes at ground level
  - the four D's (dead, diseased, damaged, dysfunctional)
  - removing 3-5 of the biggest/oldest canes at ground level
- Post-flowering pruning immediately after flowering, is focused on
  - Pruning for size and/or shape
  - Pruning cuts are made at branch connection or slightly above a bud
- Renovation pruning cuts everything down to ground level while dormant.

## SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Plant the Ninebark in a location where you can enjoy the sight of the exfoliating bark. It is a feature, not a problem!
- Ninebark is a fast-growing native cane shrub. If you make a pruning mistake, remove the entire cane.
- Prune Ninebark in a way that fits your landscape and the specific location of the shrub
  - Annual dormant pruning to remove 3-5 of the biggest/oldest canes, along with the 4 D's
  - Post-flowering pruning for shape and/or size
  - Periodic renovation pruning
- Prune for airflow and sunlight, to reduce susceptibility to powdery mildew
- Enjoy the short-lived flowers and let the birds enjoy the berries.



## Additional Resources / References:

“Rain Garden Plants:(*Physocarpus Opulifolius*) – Ninebark”, Clemson Cooperative Extension, Factsheet HGIC 1873, <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/rain-garden-plantsphysocarpus-opulifolius-ninebark/>

“Common Ninebark”, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee County Extension, <https://milwaukee.extension.wisc.edu/files/2010/09/Ninebark.pdf> (great pictures!)

“NINEBARKS—EASY AND ATTRACTIVE SHRUBS”, University of Vermont Extension, <https://pss.uvm.edu/ppp/articles/ninebark.html>

“How to Trim a Ninebark Bush”, <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/trim-ninebark-bush-22081.html>

“How to Prune Ninebark”, Fine Gardening, <https://www.finegardening.com/project-guides/pruning/how-to-prune-ninebark>

Knox County Master Gardeners website: [www.knoxcountymastergardener.org](http://www.knoxcountymastergardener.org)

Knox County Master Gardeners Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCountyMG>

Ask-a-Master Gardener / Knox County Extension Helpline: (865) 215-2340

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