

Practising Pruning

by Leigh Murray

It seems to be taking me an inordinately long time to get the hang of pruning. I've been at it, enthusiastically, for years – and I'm still getting problems. I'm an incorrigible tip pruner, and I used to think that it was a good technique for just about everything. Now I'm not so sure.

My latest little difficulty is that *Eucalyptus leucoxylon* of all sizes seem to take umbrage at my pruning. If I pinch out a tip of a small plant, the plant sits there and looks at me, declining (at least for ages) to shoot new growth below the missing tip. And when our biggest *E. leucoxylon* at Tuross, which was about 5m tall at the time, was cut back some years ago to try to keep it to an easily-maintainable height, quite a number of branches died back. This really surprised me, because the pruning didn't seem to me to be particularly severe – we just cut each of the taller branches back to a point above active growth on that branch. Similar and somewhat harsher treatment of its neighbouring *E. lansdowneana* resulted in enthusiastic growth.

One thing I have learnt is that *Acacia fimbriata* adores frequent tip pruning. It loathes to be cut back hard, and will not re-shoot if cut below active growth. But a tip removed here and there on an on-going basis results in a beautifully bushy, attractively weeping shrub. It looks gorgeous. *A. covenyi*, on the other hand, can be cut back into bare, rock-hard wood, and it will usually shoot again from that. It's amazing.

The stunningly beautiful *Myoporum floribundum* has a reputation for not liking to be pruned at all. Yet I've never noticed any sulking after I've either tipped ours or cut back slightly harder. (I'm not saying it hasn't happened, just that I haven't noticed it. It took me a long long time to realise that my pruning technique was not appreciated by *E. leucoxylon*, so I might just be very slow to notice these things.)

One pruning lesson I've learnt is that *Lomandra longifolia* can be cut back very hard, and in fact, it seems to be beneficial to do this while they are establishing. Rabbits taught me that – they ate the plants back to almost ground level, and the plants thrived, doing much better than their un-eaten siblings.

So, as I prune, hopefully I learn. I do *try* to avoid upsetting our plants, but it seems I've got some way to go in learning how to do that.