

Pruning Guide

Protea stems have several growth spurts each year before setting flowers. These spurts can be identified by growth rings on the stems.

If stems are not cut back each season, new stems for the following season will grow from under each flower, which is undesirable in managing a compact, bushy and attractive shrub. Never just dead head the stems.

The most convenient practise in pruning proteas is to cut the flower stems for the vase. This enables pruning to be undertaken at the same time thus progressively initiating new shoots for next season's flower stems over the current flowering season. This practise will extend the next season's flowering period and if carried out annually as the bushes mature, will eventually extend the flowering season to the maximum period each season. At the end of each season, the bushes will need to be tidied up by pruning the stems of any dead flowers previously left or missed.

Where all flowers are left on the bush, pruning should take place at the end of the flowering season. Because new shoots will be generated all at the same time, the following year's flowering season will be more condensed than if stems had been cut as flowers opened.

The primary rules to follow when pruning Proteas are:

1. Always prune $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of each flower stem but leave a number of green leaves [10-15cm] below where you cut. Never prune into bare wood.
2. Pruning cuts should be at a growth ring on the stem. The strongest buds will emerge from the top of a growth spurt.
3. By-pass shoots coming from under the flower should be removed when the flower stem is cut or [if the flower is left on the bush] removed when young and soft to better show off the flower. When these by-pass shoots are left they become the next season's flower stems and in no time the bush will become leggy and more difficult to manage.
4. As pruning takes place, remove or cut back any damaged, deformed, broken or dead branches.

If these simple pruning rules are followed each year the reward will be a bushy, attractive and manageable shrub that maximises flowering potential and length of season each year.