

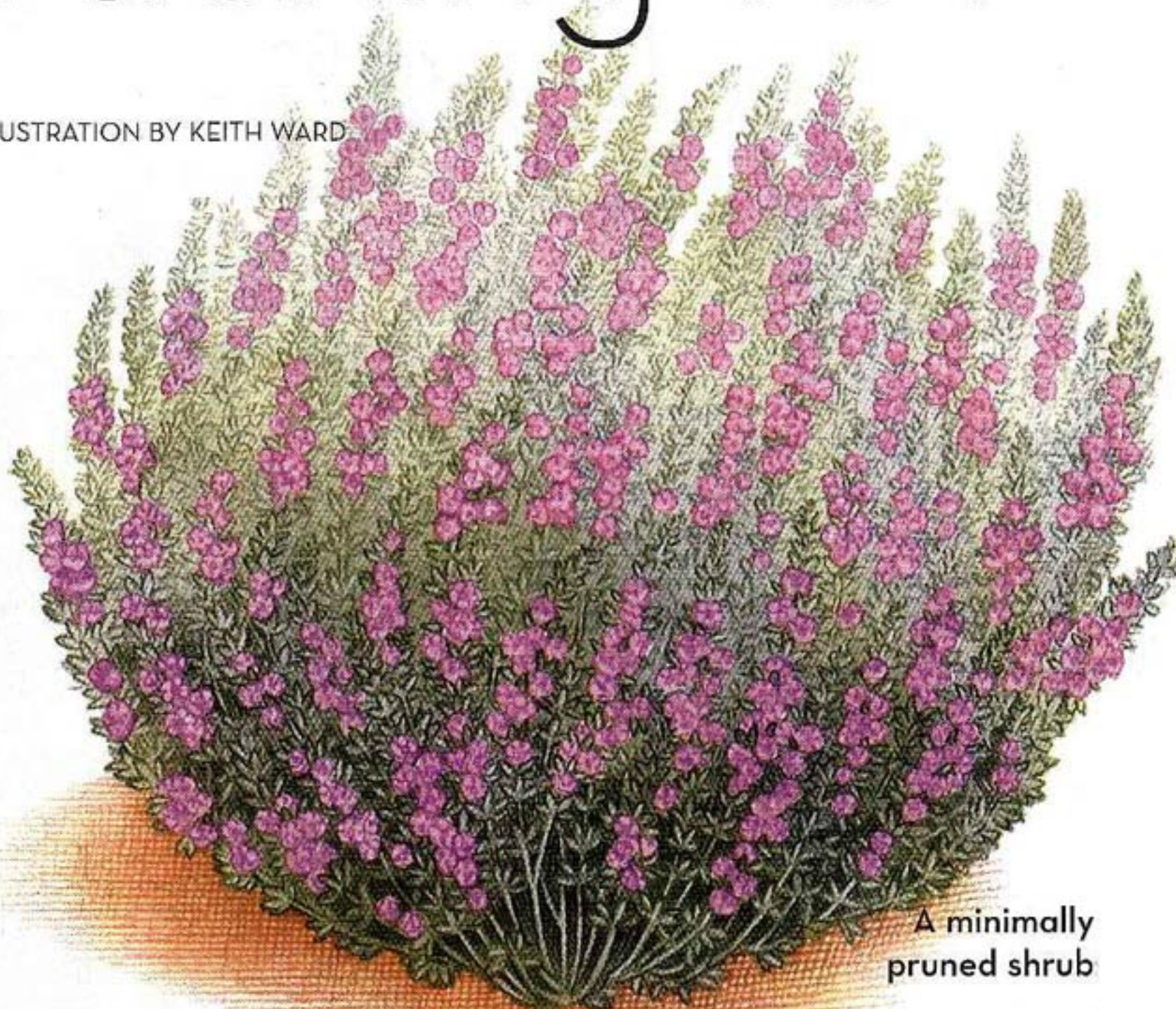
Desert Gardening 101

A primer for pruning shrubs

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A severely pruned shrub



A minimally pruned shrub

SAY NO TO GEOMETRY

WHEN IT COMES TO PRUNING, allow native and desert-adapted shrubs to retain their attractive natural forms and branching patterns, advise horticulturists and other plant experts.

The reasons for refraining from shearing plants into geometric cubes and balls are numerous. Cutting all stems to one length creates a “flat” surface. Severe pruning also eliminates flowering and subsequent seed production. Consequently, the shrub offers neither food nor shelter for birds. In addition, once plants are sheared in this manner, frequent pruning is required to maintain the unnatural shapes. This also produces a weakened plant sus-

ceptible to pests, disease and frost damage, and creates green waste destined for the landfill.

PRUNING TIPS

- Plant shrubs in locations with room to grow to their mature height and width to minimize the need for pruning.
- Remove broken, crossed, diseased, weakened or dead branches at their points of origin—where they attach to parent branches or trunks. Do not leave stubs.
- Thin lightly only if needed to remove crowded branches; this opens the interior of the plant to air circulation, sunlight and new growth. When thinning, remove

the oldest and tallest branches at their points of origin.

■ To restore a shrub that has been sheared into an unnatural form, prune it back in spring, following these guidelines: For herbaceous plants such as oleander and bougainvillea, prune to 6 inches above the ground. For woodier plants such as senna and Texas ranger, prune to 12 inches. Allow shrubs to regrow and establish a more natural branching pattern.

WHEN TO PRUNE

- Prune summer-blooming shrubs in January when they are dormant.
- Prune spring-blooming shrubs immediately after they finish flowering.



TOOLS

■ Use bypass pruners (bottom left) for small stems less than a half-inch in diameter. Use bypass loppers (left) for thicker stems up to an inch and a half in diameter. Both tools use a scissorlike action to make a smooth, clean cut that can heal easily.

■ Do not use anvil-style pruners or loppers. They only have one blade, which crushes plant tissue against a flat surface, and the cuts do not heal readily.

