

Department of Horticulture

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service • West Lafayette, IN

Hedges

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Hedges can fill a dual purpose in the home landscape, providing both privacy and beauty for the entire area. Many ornamental plants, both trees and shrubs, are well suited for hedges, but selection of a specific plant should be made by considering the particular purpose of the hedge and the growing conditions at the desired site.

Hedges may be used to mark boundaries, such as along property lines, walks or drives, and they may also be used as barriers to keep children or animals in or out of the yard. They are also useful in screening off undesirable views, to provide privacy or to serve as windbreaks.

Regardless of the purpose, hedges should be dense and compact. For best appearance, the hedge should be easily sheared and yet look good after shearing. Usually plants with medium or fine leaves make better hedges than those with coarse leaves.

For persons considering hedges, a word of caution: a homeowner contemplating a hedge planting should be committed to a major maintenance item. If you are interested in low maintenance landscaping, then think carefully before planting a hedge.

Selection

Sometimes a flowering hedge is desirable. Such plants may be pruned periodically, perhaps once a year, but allowed to grow in their natural informal shape rather than in a sheared unnatural form.

Deciduous hedges generally provide screening only during the growing season. However some types, if pruned severely over a period of time, will form a dense tangle of twigs which provide a fair winter screen.

Evergreens, both broad and narrow-leaved types, are effective year-round hedges. Recommended species of hedge plants are listed in Table 2.

Planting

Deciduous hedge plants are usually planted as bare root or container stock. Narrow and broad-leaved evergreens

should be planted balled and burlapped or from containers. Use the basic techniques described in HO-100, "Planting Ornamental Trees and Shrubs."

For most hedges, digging a planting trench is preferred over individual plant holes. Be sure to set the plants at their original soil levels after carefully preparing the entire trench area. The plant spacing will vary with the type of stock and the purpose of the hedge. For small formal hedges, space the plants 6-8 inches apart. Larger plants can be spaced 18-30 inches apart. Conifers for tall screens which require little trimming should be spaced about six feet apart. Plants for informal or untrimmed hedges should be spaced farther apart than if planted for trimmed hedges. To assure a thicker hedge, place plants in a double row (2 rows 12 inches apart with plants staggered as shown in Figure 1). Follow the guidelines in the previous paragraph for within-row spacing.

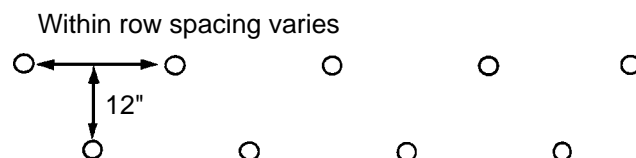


Figure 1. Staggering plants in a double row is desirable for thick hedges.

With deciduous plants, cut back the plants to within 6-8 inches of the ground immediately after planting. This allows the roots to become established and produces fuller top growth. Evergreens should be given a preliminary shaping at planting time.

Training

Most people make the mistake of allowing the hedge to grow too tall before cutting. An ideal hedge is well-branched to the ground. As a general rule, stems should be cut back at least six inches every time they grow a foot.

The sides of the hedge should be cut proportionally. Never allow the top of the hedge to become wider than

the bottom. Wide tops tend to shade out the lower branches, and the hedge will become weak and leggy. By keeping the top narrower than the bottom, snow accumulation should also be less of a problem (Figure 2).

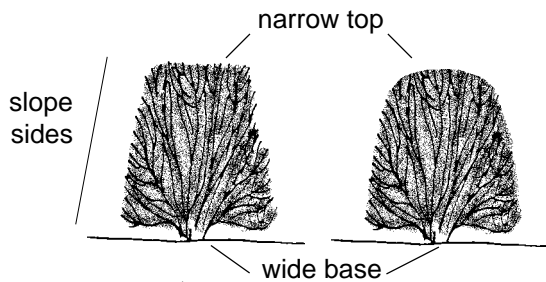


Figure 2. Correct hedge form.

The top of the hedge can be either flat or rounded. Flat tops are easier to cut, but more visually stiff. Always use a pair of stakes and a heavy cord for guidance while developing the desired shape, for few homeowners can prune a hedge evenly strictly by eye.

The length of time necessary to achieve the desired size hedge will depend upon the plant and its vigor. The sketches in Figure 3 show a six year sequence.

Care

Deciduous hedges

Most formal deciduous hedges will need reshaping at least two times each season. Usually one pruning when the plants are at their desired height and one later in the season is sufficient.

Plants which grow rapidly, such as privet, may require pruning several times during the growing season. Prune when the new growth has reached about six inches.

If grown informally, prune as for specimen shrubs as outlined in HO-4, "Pruning Ornamental Trees and Shrubs." It is essential that flowering time be considered when pruning flowering hedges.

For established hedges, cut back nearly, but not quite, to old wood each time. For small hedges a pair of hedge shears may be used, but for large hedges an electric hedge trimmer is desirable. Use stakes and a long cord to keep the lines of the hedge straight.

Narrow-leaved evergreens

Generally, narrow-leaved evergreens require less pruning than deciduous hedge plants. Do not be afraid to prune the fine-twigged types such as arborvitae, hemlock or yews fairly heavily. For pines, spruces and firs, remove the lead bud or shoot on the tip of every branch each year by snipping or pinching. Then shape into a formal effect with a pruning shears. Prune small leaved types such as junipers and taxus in the spring before growth starts. The coarse types, such as pine and spruce, are handled best in the spring after growth has started.

Broad-leaf evergreens

Broad-leaved evergreens such as the hollies should be pruned just enough to keep the branches in line. Always cut back to side branches or buds. Usually a pruning in the spring before growth starts and a lighter pruning later on to straighten up the hedge lines is sufficient.

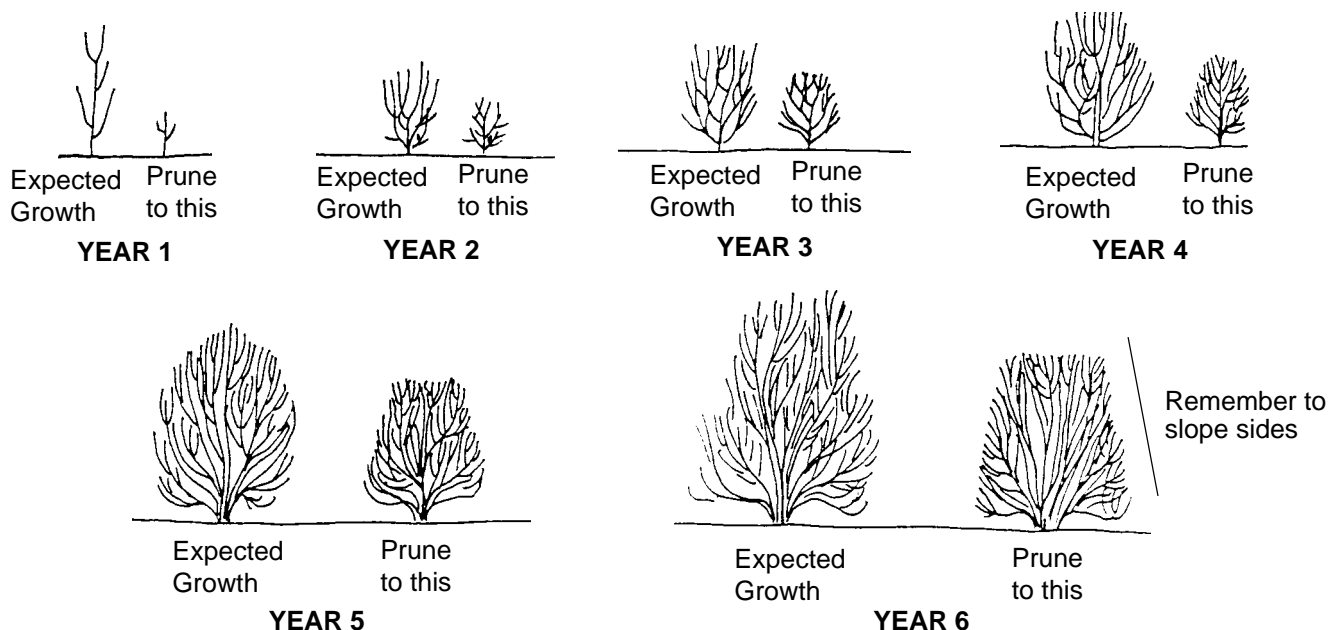


Figure 3. Each pair of sketches represents one year in the six year development of a formal hedge.

Rejuvenation

Often homeowners find themselves the proud owners of an overgrown neglected hedge. If the hedge is of the deciduous type, there are two choices, depending on the specific plant involved.

If the hedge is not too badly overgrown, cut back the sides and top 6 inches more than is desired for the eventual finished hedge. This "minor cutback" allows a new twiggy outside layer to form which may be pruned to the desired size in several stages.

If the hedge is badly overgrown, some plant species may be completely cut back to within 6-12 inches of the ground (Table 1). However, do not assume all plant species will respond favorably to this treatment. In many cases, the entire hedge should be removed and re-planted with new plants of a desirable type. For cutting, use a large lopper or saw to remove large stems. This "complete cutback" technique works especially well with privet and forsythia. Train the new growth as if you were starting a new hedge.

Rejuvenation of evergreen hedges is usually limited to the "minor cutback" approach. Many evergreens will not re-grow if cut back to where no foliage is present on the stem. It is often necessary to pull out an old evergreen hedge and start over with new plants.

Table 1. Landscape plants which may be completely cut back to the ground to rejuvenate an old, overgrown planting.

Common name	Scientific name
Orange-eye butterfly bush	<i>Buddleia davidii</i>
Jackman Clematis	<i>Clematis jackmanii</i>
Forsythia	Forsythia
Shrub-althea	<i>Hibiscus syriacus</i>
Hills-of-Snow	<i>Hydrangea arborescens grandiflora</i>
Oakleaf Hydrangea	<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i>
Privet	<i>Ligustrum</i> species
Honeysuckle	Lonicera
Silver fleece vine	<i>Polygonum aubertei</i>
Spiraea	Spiraea
Lilac	Syringa

Table 2. Recommended hedge plants.

Name	Mature Height (feet)	Flowering Ability	Remarks
Glossy Abelia <i>Abelia x grandiflora</i>	5	Purplish white flowers from mid-July on	For southern Indiana only. May be slow to make thick hedge.
White Fir <i>Abies concolor</i>	65		Large evergreen tree with silver green to blue color. Not as vigorous as other large evergreens.
Five-Leaved Aralia <i>Acanthopanax sieboldianus*</i>	9		Dense and compact, very thorny. Will withstand poor growing conditions.
Amur Maple <i>Acer ginnala*</i>	20		Dense and compact, requires little pruning. Useful for large windbreaks and screens.
Chenault Barberry <i>Berberis chenaultii*</i>	4		Thorny, dense hedge. Evergreen in habit. For southern Indiana only.
Japanese Barberry <i>Berberis thunbergii*</i>	7	Small yellowish flowers in mid-May	Thorny, dense habit. Ideal for low border. Green leaves produce showy red fruit. Will withstand poor growing conditions.
Japanese Barberry <i>Berberis thunbergii atropurpurea</i>			Red leaves. Numerous cultivars available.
Korean Boxwood <i>Buxus microphylla 'koreana'*</i>	4		Low growing, dense, compact evergreens.

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Common Boxwood <i>Buxus sempervirens</i> and cultivars	20		Dense compact evergreen. Slow growing. For southern Indiana only.
Dwarf Boxwood <i>Buxus sempervirens</i> 'Suffruticosa'*	3		Dense, low growing, compact evergreen. For southern Indiana only.
European Hornbeam <i>Carpinus betulus</i> *	60		Narrow, upright habit which is dense and compact. Excellent for wind-breaks and screens. Cultivars <i>Columaris Fastigiata</i> or <i>Globosa</i> are excellent.
Oriental Quince <i>Chaenomeles</i> species*	3-6	Red, white, orange, pink flowers in May	Thorny, dense, compact habit. Some species will produce quince fruit. Smaller growing types are better left unshaped. Taller types can be sheared back occasionally.
Cornelian Cherry <i>Cornus mas</i> *	24	Small yellow flowers in early April	Dense compact small tree. Red fruit are produced in summer.
Gray Dogwood <i>Cornus racemosa</i> *	15	White flowers in mid-June	Dense, billowy, compact, habit. White berries abundant on pink pedicels.
Cockspur Hawthorn <i>Crataegus crus-galli</i>	36		Thorny, dense and compact.
Washington Hawthorn <i>Crataegus phaenopyrum</i> *	30		Thorny, dense and compact. Orange-red berries.
Winged Euonymus <i>Euonymus alatus</i>	6-8		Dense plant with early green foliage. Conspicuous corky twigs. Bright red fall color. Stands clipping well. The cultivar 'compactus' is more dwarf in habit (5').
Evergreen Bittersweet <i>Euonymus fortunei</i> 'Sarcocoe'	4		Low growing evergreen. Pink and orange fruit.
American Beech <i>Fagus grandifolia</i> *	90		Dense compact tree. Useful for wind-breaks or screens. May be difficult to transplant. Usually expensive.
European Beech <i>Fagus sylvatica</i> * and cultivars	90		Dense compact tree. Useful for wind-breaks or screens. May be difficult to transplant. Usually more expensive.
Showy Border Forsythia <i>Forsythia x intermedia</i> and cultivars	9	Showy yellow flowers in mid-April	A vigorous shrub, requires more pruning for formal hedges. Excellent for loose-open borders. Cultivars 'Spectabilis', 'Lynwood Gold', 'Spring Glory' provide a great mass of bloom.
Shrubby St. John's-Wort <i>Hypericum prolificum</i>	3	Showy yellow flower in early July	Low growing for short border.
Burford Chinese Holly <i>Ilex cornuta</i> 'Burfordii'	20		Thorny broad-leaved evergreen. Suited for only extreme southern portion of Indiana. Fruit is colorful.
Japanese Hollies <i>Ilex crenata</i> and cultivars	20		Broad-leaved evergreen. Suited for only extreme southern portion of Indiana.
American Holly <i>Ilex opaca</i> *	45		Thorny broad-leaved evergreen. Fruit is colorful. May be winter injured in northern areas.
Keteleeri Juniper <i>Juniperus chinensis</i> 'Keteleeri'*	20		Loose evergreen with light-medium green leaves. Pyramidal form.
Canaerti Juniper <i>Juniperus virginiana</i> 'Canaertii'*	35		Dense compact evergreen with dark green leaves. Pyramidal form.

True Lavender <i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>	3	Blue flowers in mid-summer	Low growing woody herb. Can be sheared or allowed to grow naturally. Use only for small garden situations.
Amur Privet <i>Ligustrum amurense</i>	15		Dense compact. Needs several prunings. The hardiest of the privets. Has blue-black fruit.
Ibolium Privet <i>Ligustrum x ibolium</i>	12		Dense and compact when sheared. Blue-black fruit are attractive.
Regels Privet <i>Ligustrum obtusifolium regelianum</i>	5	Creamy-white flowers in mid-June. Note: privets are overused in many landscapes. They are plagued by several problems, and parts of hedges often winterkill.	Graceful, horizontal branched dense habit. Blue-black fruits are attractive all winter.
Osage Orange <i>Maclura pomifera</i>	40		Dense compact thorny habit. Use only for tall hedges where other plants won't survive. Useful for windbreaks or screens. The hedge most planted by farmers years ago.
Norway Spruce <i>Picea abies*</i>	60		Dense compact narrow-leaved ever-green tree. Needs shearing. Useful for windbreaks or screens.
Eastern White Pine <i>Pinus strobus*</i>	80		Dense compact evergreen tree. Needs shearing. Useful for windbreaks or screens.
Shrubby Cinquefoil <i>Potentilla fruticosa</i> and cultivars	4	Yellow, white, brown flowers mid-June through July	Low growing semi-evergreen. Many cultivars are excellent for low, unclipped, flowering hedges.
Douglasfir <i>Pseudotsuga menziesii*</i>	80		Dense compact evergreen tree. Excellent for windbreaks or screens. Difficult to grow in some locations.
Shingle Oak <i>Quercus imbricaria*</i>	75		Dense compact tree. Sometimes retains leaves long into the winter. Use for windbreaks or screens. May be difficult to find.
Willow Oak <i>Quercus phellos*</i>	50		Dense compact tree. For windbreaks or screens. May be difficult to find. For southern Indiana only.
Tallhedge Buckthorn <i>Rhamnus frangula 'Columnaris'*</i>	18		Dense compact narrow upright habit. One of the best for screening. Ideal for windbreaks or screens.
Alpine Currant <i>Ribes alpinum*</i>	7-1/2		Dense compact low growing habit. Ideal for trying situations. The male form is thought to be immune to white pine blister rust.
Rugosa Rose <i>Rosa rugosa*</i> and cultivars	6	Red, pink and white flowers in mid-June	Dense thorny habit. The red fruits are showy.
Virginia Rose <i>Rosa virginiana</i>	6	Pink flowers in early June	Dark glossy foliage. Best used as informal, unclipped, flowering hedge. Best cut to ground every 4-5 years.
Bridalwreath Spirea <i>Spiraea prunifolia</i>	9	White flowers in early May	Dense graceful habit with glossy green leaves which turn a rich red in the fall. Double-flowered form 'Plena' and 'Simpliciflora' bloom well.
Chinese Lilac <i>Syringa x chinensis</i> and cultivars	6-8	Rose-purple flowers in late-May	Neutral dense plant. Has small leaves. Use for screening.

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Common Lilac <i>Syringa vulgaris</i> and cultivars	9-12	Lilac flowers in early to mid-May	Coarse foliage and vigorous growers. Many cultivars available. Will tolerate trying conditions.
Japanese Yew <i>Taxus cuspidata</i> and cultivars	3-50		Dense compact evergreen. Red fruits are colorful. Narrow upright forms require little pruning.
Anglojap Yew <i>Taxus x media</i> and cultivars	20		Dense compact evergreen. Narrow upright forms require little pruning.
American Arborvitae <i>Thuja occidentalis</i> * and cultivars	30		Dense compact evergreen. Narrow upright forms require little pruning. Useful for windbreaks and screens. Do not use in hot, dry situations. Suggested are: Douglas pyramidal arborvitae, Globe arborvitae, Little Gem arborvitae.
Giant Arborvitae <i>Thuja plicata</i> * and cultivars	70		Best Thuja for landscape purposes. Dense evergreen. Useful for windbreaks or screens. Do not use in hot dry situations.
Littleleaf Linden <i>Tilia cordata</i> *	70		Dense compact tree. Use for windbreaks or screens.
Canada Hemlock <i>Tsuga canadensis</i> * and cultivars	70		Dense compact evergreen tree. Use for windbreaks or screens.
Carolina Hemlock <i>Tsuga caroliniana</i> *	60		Dense compact evergreen tree. Use for windbreaks or screens. Will withstand urban conditions better than Canada hemlock.
Nannyberry <i>Viburnum lentago</i> *	30	White flowers in late May	Dense compact habit. Blue-black fruit in fall. Round, neutral, dense shrub.
Compact European Cranberry Bush <i>Viburnum opulus</i> 'Compactum'	6	White flowers in early June	Dense compact habit. Red showy fruit in fall.
Dwarf European Cranberry Bush <i>Viburnum opulus</i> 'Nanum'	3		Rounded and very dense.
Black Haw Viburnum <i>Viburnum prunifolium</i> *	15	White flowers in late May	Dense compact shrub. Use for windbreaks or screens. Produces blue-black fruit.
Compact American Cranberry Bush <i>Viburnum trilobum</i> 'Compactum'	6	White flowers in early June	Dense and compact. Produces red fruit.

*Dense, compact, most ideally suited for hedges with minimum amount of training.

**This publication was originally authored by Juliann Chamberlain.*

For more information on the subject discussed in this publication, consult your local office of the Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service.