

Hedges enhance outdoor living spaces by creating rooms, privacy, and moderating the environment. A surprising number of plants can be used for hedges including trees, shrubs, and even ornamental grasses.

Proper planning, plant selection, and planting are essential to the establishment of a quality hedge. Pruning maintenance is greatly reduced by selecting plants that naturally grow to the size and shape of the intended hedge. For general information on pruning techniques and tools refer to pruning bulletins #15, #16, and #17.

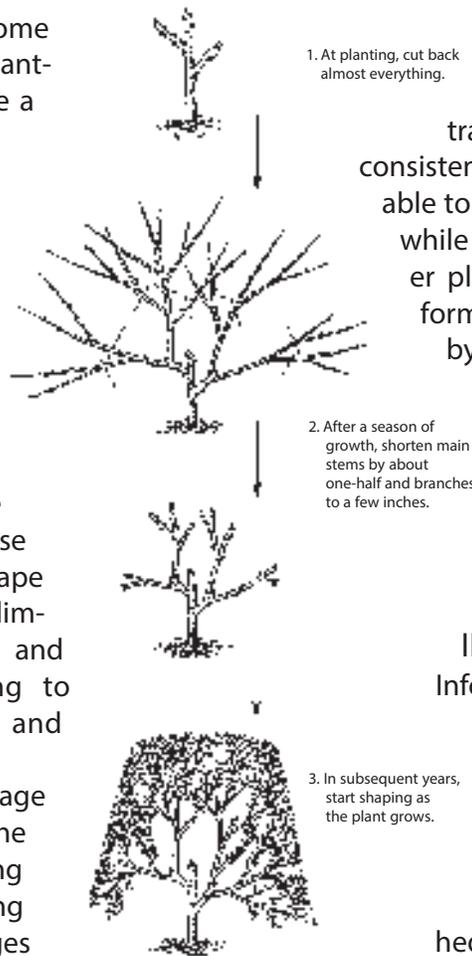
STARTING OUT

There are various methods for training a hedge. Some advocate severe pruning at planting time while others advocate a more moderated approach. To understand the different approaches, it is important to look at the function of a hedge. A hedge functions as a barrier, either visually or physically, and as such requires a dense branching structure from the top to the bottom of the hedge. Some plants naturally have good branching from the base and need limited pruning to shape the hedge. Other shrubs have limited branching at their base and require more severe pruning to encourage good branching and hedge form.

It is important to encourage dense branching early on in the life of the hedge. Initial pruning should concentrate on reducing top growth, which encourages side branching lower on the

shrub. For plants that don't have good structure heavy pruning is required and will result in a better hedge. For such plants, prune main stems back leaving short stubs after the first year of growth (see illustration). Lee Reich, in his book titled The Pruning Book, suggests it be done at time of planting. The following year cut back subsequent growth on main stems by about 1/2 and side branches to within a few inches of these main stems. Subsequent seasons can focus on the overall shape of the hedge. The shape of the hedge is important to maintain density. The top should be narrower than the base. This will allow sunlight to reach lower branches and prevent bare spots or thinning.

Pruning a Formal Deciduous Hedge



FORMAL HEDGES

Formal hedges require more training, because formality requires consistency in shape and size. It is desirable to maintain the size of larger plants while encouraging the growth of smaller plants until all plants attain a uniform size. This can be accomplished by pruning back the taller plants until the smaller plants catch up. Slowly allow the hedge to reach its mature height by regular annual pruning removing no more than 1/2 of the new growth.

INFORMAL HEDGES

Informal hedges can be allowed to grow naturally if good side branching is occurring from the base to the top. Pruning should concentrate on removing unwanted stems and maintaining a wider base. Informal hedges will only require pruning to maintain shape when necessary.

HEDGES FROM THE ARTHUR S. HOLDEN HEDGE COLLECTION

TYPE AND SPECIES	PRUNING NOTES
CONIFEROUS TALL SCREEN HEDGES	
Western Arborvitae <i>Thuja plicata</i>	Top-prune the tall spindly leader back to the denser portion of the tree after planting. The scale-like foliage can be easily pruned back to the lateral branchlets.
Canadian Hemlock <i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	Top-prune the tall spindly leader back to the denser portion of the tree after planting. The conical shape will serve as a guide to establishing the inclined plane of the hedge. Allow the trees to grow together before intense pruning begins. Pruning cuts should be made between needles or back to branching junctures. The fine texture of the hemlock demands more time for maintenance pruning.
DECIDUOUS TALL SCREEN HEDGES	
Hedge Maple <i>Acer campestre</i>	Prune this maple to the desired size and control growth because the mature size exceeds 12' in height and 30' in width. The secondary flush of growth lacks the size of the spring growth. Stagger pruning cuts below the surface of the foliage to reduce the number of smaller-sized leaves.
Upright European Hornbeam <i>Carpinus betulus</i> 'Fastigiata'	Start with 2-3 year old specimen trees, allowing the hedge to mature to the desired height. Lightly prune new shoots to maintain natural shape and desired height.
PARTIAL SCREEN/BARRIER HEDGES	
Dwarf Korean Lilac <i>Syringa meyeri</i> 'Palibin'	Plant hedge in organically rich, well-drained soil and full sun exposure. Little pruning and no deadheading are required unlike other lilacs. Allow an equal width to height ratio for best appearance.
Nippon Spirea <i>Spiraea nipponica</i> 'Snowmound'	Prune spent floral shoots back to main branches. Requires annual deadwood pruning.
Mentor Barberry <i>Berberis x mentorensis</i>	Wear gloves while pruning; thorns offer good barrier. Young shoots are easier to prune as thorns are less developed. Tends to grow vase-shaped.
Scarlet Firethorn <i>Pyracantha coccinea</i> 'Lalandei'	Wear gloves while pruning this hedge. This species may suffer dieback from extreme cold, or from fire blight during wet cool seasons. Prune infected tissue back to healthy wood.
BORDER HEDGES	
Boxwood <i>Buxus</i> 'Green Mountain'	An upright form of boxwood that keeps its own shape. Begin shape pruning after hedge reaches desired height.
Dwarf Alpine Currant <i>Ribes alpinum</i> 'Green Mound'	Requires no pruning until desired size is obtained. Compact form is slow growing requiring only one pruning per season.

REJUVENATION PRUNING

Most hedges can be pruned back to old wood near the end of the dormant season before bud break. Maple (*Acer* species) and other heavy sap flowing species can be pruned just after leaf drop in late fall, thus preventing the sap from running in late

winter. Evergreen hedges are generally less tolerant to rejuvenation pruning, so selectively thin and prune back the exterior surface for several years, allowing new growth to emerge further back into the hedge.

References:

Brooklyn Botanic Garden. Pruning Techniques. Brooklyn Botanic Garden, 1991.
Reich, Lee. The Pruning Book. Tauton Press, 1997.