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# Hedges— planting and care

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## Quick Facts

- Planting stock for hedges should be thrifty, healthy and uniform.
- Young trees or shrubs are preferable for hedge planting.
- Early spring planting is best for hedges in the Rocky Mountain region.
- Careful pruning is necessary to produce desired shape and density.
- Properly pruned hedges should be slightly narrower at top than bottom to prevent shading out of lower branches.

Hedges are often desirable on residential property to help delineate property lines, provide a screen or windbreak or to create design for a landscaping effect. Common types of hedges include privet, forsythia, barberry, cotoneaster and Russian olive, although almost any type of woody plant can, with care, be trained into a hedge.

## Selection

Choice of planting stock should be based on the health and thriftiness of plants. Stock should be free from insects and disease.

Some dealers may offer special hedge materials at bargain prices, but such plants often are stunted and culled from regular nursery stock. Though they may be inexpensive, they are a poor investment.

Normal, well-grown plants are the only ones that should be used for hedges. They should be of similar size, shape, root development and foliage color, because their uniformity will influence the appearance of the ultimate hedge to a considerable extent.

Planting young trees or shrubs usually is preferable to using older stock. In planting a deciduous hedge, the gardener should select one-year-old seedlings or cuttings. These are available as dormant, bare-root material in early spring. For an evergreen hedge, it is best to use container-grown or balled and burlapped stock.

## Planting

Early spring planting is preferable to fall planting in the Rocky Mountain region.

Planning for plant spread is the first step in planting. Young plants should not be placed too close to a wall, walk or driveway which allow no space for spreading. The spread of a hedge will depend on the species used. Unclipped hedges (informal) require more space than those that are sheared for formal effects. The average hedge 3 to 5 feet (.9-1.5 meters) in height will be 3 to 5 feet (.9-1.5 m) wide. This means the plants for such a hedge should be set 18 to 24 inches (45-61 centimeters) from a property line, wall, driveway or walk.

Digging a trench of adequate size and desired length is the next step in planting. After deciding the proper location of the hedge, the gardener should prepare a trench deep enough to accept the root system for the plants and long enough to place them all at the same time.

Spacing of plants also will depend on the species used. Dwarf plants, such as the dwarf arctic willow, should be set about six inches (15 cm) apart. Plants for medium height hedges, such as privet or forsythia, should be spaced about 12 inches (30.5 cm) apart. Plants for hedges composed of tree species, such as Russian olive, usually are spaced 18 to 30 inches (45-76 cm) apart.

Each step of the planting procedure should be completed at one time. After digging the entire trench, the gardener should line out the young plants at the proper spacing and quickly backfill the trench with soil so that the roots will not dry out. Then the plants should be watered well and pruned.

## Pruning

Pruning back after planting should be done according to the amount of branching of the planting stock. Very small, unbranched stock should be pruned to within three or four inches (7.6-10 cm) of the ground. Moderately branched, larger material should be pruned 10 to 12 inches (25-30.5 cm) from the ground and well-branched

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stock 18 to 24 inches (45-61 cm) from the ground. More or less pruning may be necessary depending on the condition of the original stock.

Pruning to train the hedge during early development is important to its future shape and density.

After planting and pruning back, plants should be allowed to develop new growth until about the end of June. Then the growth should again be cut back by removing approximately two-thirds of it in order to force plants to develop more side branches. Depending on the vigor and species of the plants used, a third and even fourth pruning can be done before frost.

When the plants begin to form a dense hedge, the hedge should be shaped so that it is narrower at the top than at the bottom (see Figure 1). This treatment will allow more light to penetrate the lower branches, thus reducing the amount of "legginess" which can result when lower branches are shaded by upper ones (see Figure 2).

Hedges that are oriented in an east-west direction should be sheared so that the side facing north is sloped more than the side facing south. This will allow more light to penetrate the shaded north side and result in a more uniform appearing hedge.

Periodic pruning needed by the hedge plants, once they have been trained into a hedge, will depend upon the type of hedge, whether it is to be formal or informal and its ultimate size.

Informal hedges require less frequent pruning, but branches growing in an undesirable direction may need to be removed occasionally. Also, periodic pruning might be necessary to encourage dense, screening growth.

Vigorous plants, such as Russian olive, privet and arctic willow, should be sheared several times during the growing season if they are to be maintained as a formal hedge.

## Pest Control

Attacks of hedges by insects or disease can be severe and result in open places in the hedge.

Insect pests, particularly aphids and infestations of spider mites, should be treated immediately with appropriate pesticides. (For more information see Service in Action sheets 5.507 and 5.511).

Foliage diseases, such as mildew or leaf spot, generally are not serious if preventive fungicides are applied during the growing season. Disease of the main trunk in hedges, such as the numerous types of canker diseases, usually are more difficult to control. They often necessitate removing portions of a hedge and replanting with healthy material.

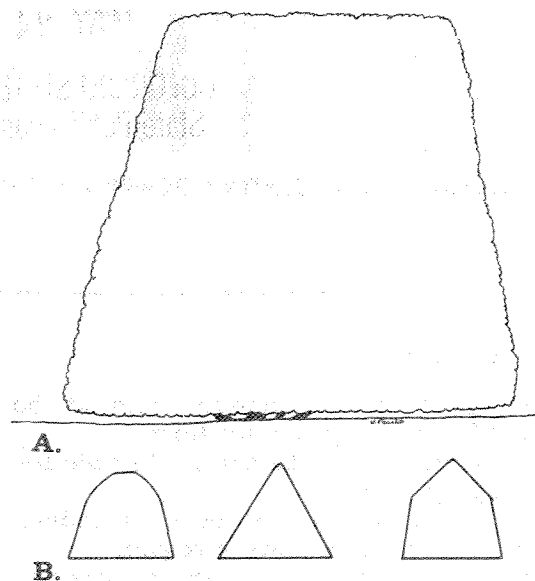


Figure 1: A) The proper way to shape a hedge (end view). B) other shapes that can be used which will still result in dense foliage all the way to the ground line.

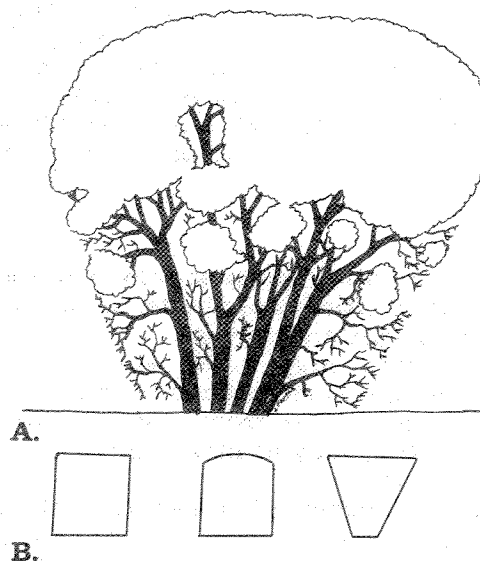


Figure 2: A) A hedge improperly shaped (end view). The wider top has shaded out foliage at base resulting in a "leggy" look. B) Other shapes of common use but which will result in a thin, leggy hedge.