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### G87-856 Hedges

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## Hedges

**Hedges can be an attractive and functional part of home landscaping. This NebGuide outlines the steps for proper plant selection and establishment, care, and rejuvenation.**

*Donald Steinegger, Extension Horticulturist*

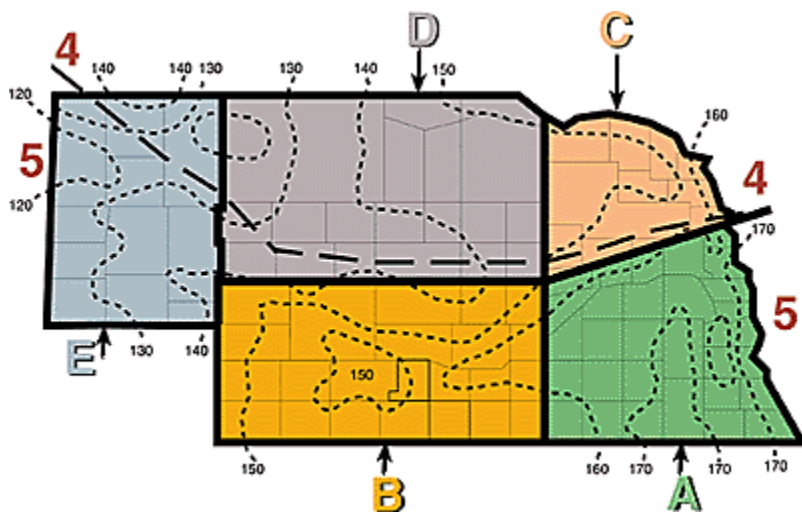
Not only are hedges attractive, but they serve some important landscape functions. Hedges, particularly sheared ones (formal), require time and some knowledge to establish them as well as annual pruning. It is also important to select suitable plant material and an appropriate site to minimize upkeep. Rapid growing plants like privet require more frequent shearing. A shady site or one with little air movement may require spraying for disease control.

Hedges mark boundaries such as property lines, walks and drives, provide barriers to animals and people, serve as windbreaks, and screen off undesirable views.

The desired size of the hedge is determined by its function. For example, an 18-inch hedge can mark a boundary while a 7- or 8-foot hedge may be required to provide privacy. Even with sheared hedges, select material which has a mature height only slightly greater than desired. While almost any plant can be used for a hedge, select plants with fine to medium textured leaves. Coarser foliage plants such as viburnum can be used for an informal hedge (*Table I*).

Informal hedges (nonsheared) reduce maintenance, but may not be a viable choice for every landscape. While suited to naturalistic designed landscapes, they are generally not attractive in highly manicured designs.

Evergreen hedges maintain their foliage all winter. Thus, they are effective as windbreaks during the winter, and are particularly attractive when the ground is snow-covered. However, if not properly located, evergreens can cause snow to accumulate on the driveway or walks. Also, heavy snow can



cause severe structural damage to evergreen hedges. Avoid locating them where snow will drift onto them from roof tops.

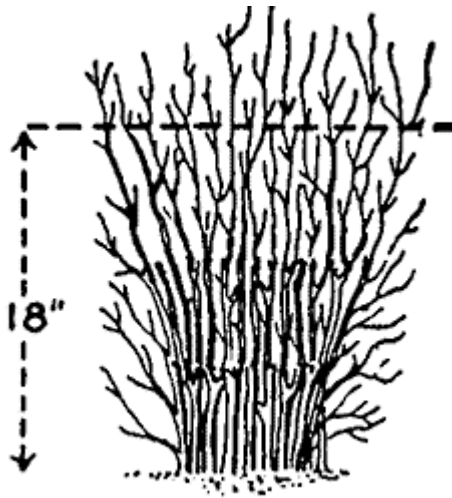
## **Planting**

To establish a deciduous hedge, buy bare root stock. Use container-planted or balled and burlapped material for an evergreen hedge. Plant spacing depends on mature plant size, formal or informal pruning, and whether it's flowering or nonflowering.

Small size plants (at maturity) are spaced 18 inches apart while larger ones are 2 to 3 feet apart for sheared hedges. Plants for informal hedges can be separated another 1 1/2 to 2 times the above distance if they spread. Flowering plants should be grown with slightly more room than nonflowering types.

## **Training and Pruning Deciduous Plants**

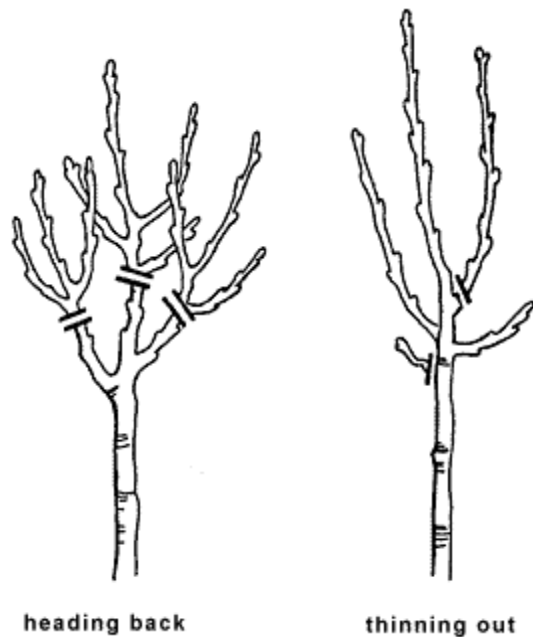
Correct training and pruning during establishment is critical if one is going to have a functional and attractive hedge. Hedges with insufficient base branches (density) as well as V-shaped ones, are common.



## **Shaping Hedges with Heading Back Cuts**

Immediately after planting, cut back deciduous plants to 6 to 8 inches above the soil line. This is done to develop branching near the soil line.

While a variety of hedge shapes or forms are possible, one must have the base wider than the top. This allows the lower portion of the hedge to receive light. Inadequate light reduces photosynthesis, and leads to death of the basal branches.



### **Basic Pruning Cuts**

Proper cutting can help develop the desired form and density. Every time the branches grow 12 inches, cut new growth back to 6 inches. Prune to an outside facing bud. Continue with this method until the hedge reaches the desired height. This is a slow process and can take five to six years, but a properly trained hedge is a striking addition to a landscape.

Once the planting is established, most formal hedges require two shearings a year. Rapidly growing plants like privet require four to six shearings a season. Each time six inches of new growth occurs, remove two-thirds of this growth.

### **Evergreens**

Narrow-leaved evergreens require less training and pruning than deciduous plants. But just like a deciduous hedge, adequate density and the correct form is essential. Junipers and yews can be pruned throughout the growing season, although the more severe pruning should be done in early spring. Don't prune back to wood that lacks foliage, especially with Junipers, because new buds will not develop on this wood. For pines, cut only into new growth when new needles are the same size and color as old needles.

### **Rejuvenation**

If the hedge still has adequate live wood and basal branches, you can reshape the hedge and develop new branch growth. Do this by heading back the sides and top, six inches more than the desired finished size. This pruning will also remove the knotty growth that occurs from shearing at the same height and width each year.

If the hedge is badly overgrown with few, if any, live branches near the base, remove the hedge and replant.

There are a few plants that can be cut back to six inches above the soil line and then reformed into a

hedge. Plants that will respond to this type of rejuvenation are forsythia, honeysuckle, spirea, lilac, and hydrangea.

The same steps are used in rejuvenating a hedge as are used with a new planting.

Almost any plant material adapted to your site can be used for a hedge. For a sheared or formal hedge, choose plants with relatively small leaves and branches; while for informal hedges, leaf size isn't as important.

Table I shows examples of plants suitable for hedges.

**Table I. Suggested plant material for hedges.**

Common Name	Botanical Name	Zone
<b>Evergreen</b>		
Large (to 20 feet)		
Canert Juniper	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i> (canaertii) (Other upright growing cultivars can be used)	All
		Small (to 8 feet)
Euonymus	<i>Euonymus fortunei</i> var. <i>vegetus</i> (Use in protected areas avoid southern and especially southwestern exposure)	5A
<b>Deciduous</b>		
Large (to 20 feet)		
Amur Maple	<i>Acer ginnata</i>	All
Siberian peashrub	<i>Caragana arborescens</i> 'Sutherland'	All
Winged Euonymus	<i>Euonymus alatus</i>	All
		Small (to 8 feet)
Japanese barberry	<i>Barberis thunbergii</i>	All
Amur maple 'compactum'	<i>Acer ginnata</i> 'compactum'	All
Gray-stem dogwood	<i>Cornus racemosa</i>	All
Northern sun	<i>Forsythia x intermedia</i>	All
Privet	<i>Ligustrum amurense</i>	(May be injured in 4D)
Ninebark	<i>Physocarpus opulifolias</i>	All
Alpine currant	<i>Ribes alpinum</i>	All
Arrowwood viburnum	<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>	All
		Dwarf (to 4 feet)
Dwarf ninebark	<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i> 'nanus'	All
Potentilla	<i>Potentilla fruticosa</i>	All
Blue leaf arctic willow	<i>Salix purpurea</i> 'nana'	All
Anthony Waterer	<i>Spirea x bumalda</i>	All

Dwarf viburnum	<i>Viburnum opulus 'nanum'</i>	All
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***File G856 under: HORTICULTURE***

***A-30, Ornamentals***

*Issued August 1987; 5,000 printed.*

*Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Elbert C. Dickey, Director of Cooperative Extension, University of Nebraska, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources.*

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