

Hedges

Creating a hedge requires the regular shearing of vigorous plants to produce dense, contained growth. You cannot shear a formal hedge too often to keep it looking its best. Informal hedges may need shearing only once or twice a year.

___Begin shearing a new hedge in its second or third year. Shear it regularly thereafter. Do not allow a hedge to reach its desired height and then begin shearing it for a compact, dense habit. Develop a small, dense hedge first then let it slowly reach the desired height.

___Always prune a hedge so that it is tapered toward the top. This allows sunlight to reach all the foliage, even at the base. If you sheared the sides of a hedge perpendicular to the ground, or worse, slanting out toward the top, lower foliage will succumb to the resulting shade, and the hedge will become a top-heavy eyesore.

___Provided they are vigorous and healthy, most overgrown hedges (and especially deciduous ones) respond very well to drastic pruning. Cut them back to a foot or more from the ground, and within a new years they will be good as new. Some evergreen hedges can be similarly renewed, but be sure branches have some leaves remaining. Evergreen hedges are yew, boxwood, and holly.



Illustration 1, When shearing to shape a hedge, start at the bottom and work up. Keep your shears pointed slightly inward to achieve the desired taper. In the north, do not make a flat-topped hedge; it will carry more snow and ice and will break under the weight.

___The best time to shear a hedge is when it is making its fastest growth. For needle evergreens that means early summer. Since they put on all their growth over a short period, they won't require periodic shearing after mid-summer. Deciduous plants like privet and barberry require periodic shearing throughout the summer. Shear broadleafed evergreen hedges throughout the year. Shear flowering hedges only after the blossoms have faded.

[Back](#)