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**Shaping Hedges**

Cooperative Extension South Dakota State University

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SHAPING HEDGES

Part I -- New Hedges

Part II -- Older Hedges

Cooperative Extension Service
South Dakota State University
U. S. Department of Agriculture
Shape by Pruning for the Informal Hedge.
The informal hedge should not have a sheared look. "Drop crotch pruning" will be necessary. Drop crotch pruning is selecting the unwanted branch(s) and dropping (drop) back to where it makes a union (crotch) with another branch.

"Drop crotch pruning" is making all cuts at a crotch (indicated by arrows at left).

Small pruners

Pruning or Shaping During Early Spring Aids in Rapid Recovery.

Shape by Pruning (shearing) for the Formal Hedge. The formal hedge is a sheared hedge. It requires more attention than the informal hedge. It involves removing or shearing off the tip growth with shears or with electrically-operated oscillating-type hedge shears.

One method of shaping a hedge is shown.

Hedge shears

Shaping Deciduous Hedges (Part 1)

Getting New Hedge Off to a Good Start.
Select the hedge plant that fits your requirements. If you want a 3-foot hedge, select a shrub that matures at 3-4 feet high. These require very little or no pruning.

If you want a formal hedge, mature plant height is not as important. However, the hedge will not require as much attention if height of hedge and mature height of plant are considered. If a 5-foot hedge is desired, select a plant that grows to 6-7 feet mature height. Space small plants about 18 inches apart; larger plants 2-3 feet apart.

Low hedge -- select a species that matures at a low height.

Tight guide wires or ropes insure a more even surface! Make sure wire is tight and not displaced by twig.

Stakes and 2x4-inch stakes driven at angle

Tall hedge -- select species that matures at taller heights.
Shearing Newly Planted Hedges During the First or Early Years.

A-B. Prune off half of the newly planted plant's height. This encourages buds at the bottom of the plant to open and develop the necessary lower branches.

C-D. Wait until about 12 inches of new growth is put on and prune off about half of the new growth.

The Older Hedges (Part II)

Rejuvenating the Old Hedge.

Old Knotty Surface Growth. Shearing at the same height and width year after year causes a crust of knotty growth to form. The hedge will not have a vigorous appearance. In this case remove the outside crust by cutting inside the crust about 2 or 3 inches. Do this in spring.

E. Allow the plants to grow another 12 to 18 inches and again prune half of the new growth. Repeat this until the hedge has gained the desired height. Thereafter shear it as needed at that height.
Leggy Open Bottom. Hedges having no early pruning or improper shaping have very few branches growing at the bottom. Openings begin to show at the bottom. Use one of these methods to correct the situation:

1. Prune off all growth except the bottom 6 to 12 inches. Continue pruning back new growth as described in section about newly planted hedges.

2. Or severely prune the sides to an "A" shape about half the original height. Continue pruning back new growth until the desired shape is achieved.

Overhanging top edges shade sides, which soon lose their leaves and become leggy.

Correct Hedge Forms. Prune so the sun can reach the bottom branches.
Building the Hedge. Continue pruning back part of the new growth until the desired shape is achieved.

Regular Pruning Is a Must!

Prune when planted, then each year after -- 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.

1 2 3 4 5 6 etc.