



## PRUNING HEDGES TO PROVIDE SCREENING

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An ideal hedge for screening patio areas should have dense foliage from the base to the very top of the plants. In order to develop a hedge with these qualities, the gardener should prune the plants in such a manner as to encourage the plants to develop branches and leaves at the lower portion at the time of planting and until the desired height is reached. The procedures for pruning shrubs are simple, but in many instances the basic principles are overlooked or not put into practice simply because the gardener does not want to sacrifice the growth of the plants before they reach the desired height as shown in Figure 1.

The basic steps in developing the ideal hedge for screening purposes are listed below:

### Step 1. Pruning the Newly Planted Hedge:

Many varieties of plants are suitable for hedges in the lower and higher elevations of Arizona. Your nurseryman will assist you in the proper selection. For the highest elevation refer to *az1285 Shrubs for Northern Arizona Above 6,000 foot Elevations*. Regardless of the variety used, one should cut the newly-planted plants back to one-half of their former height. Shorten the side branches if they tend to droop or are quite long.

### Step 2. Effect of Pruning at Planting Time:

Severe pruning at planting time encourages axillary buds on the bottom portion of the plant to break open. Without pruning, they would normally stay dormant and vacant spots at the bottom would be evident. The bud break at the bottom of the plants will promote development of additional branches to form a canopy of leaves (Figure 1 and 2)

### Step 3. Pruning After the Initial Heading Back:

The next pruning step involves a waiting period until the pruned plants grow approximately 12 to 18 inches in height and width. After this height and width are attained, cut new growth back about six to nine inches, or approximately one-half its previous height and width (Figure 2). Bottom of plants should be wider than tops. This practice maintains sunlight at the base of the plants which maintains healthy lower branches.

### Step 4. Effect of the Second Pruning:

This second pruning again encourages axillary buds to break open and develop branches from buds which normally might stay dormant. Again, we are encouraging new branches to fill in tight near the base of the plants.

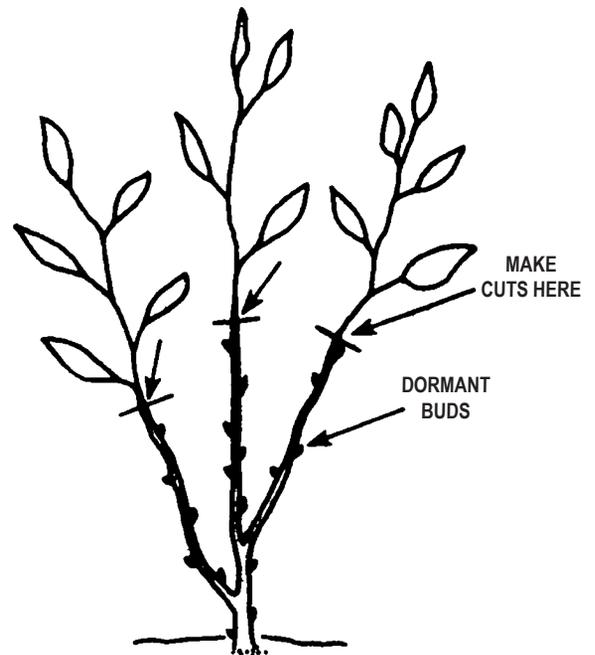


Figure 1. Newly planted hedge plant should be cut back one-half its former height. This encourages dormant buds near the bottom to form new growth. See Figure 2 for resulting growth of axillary buds when pruned when young.

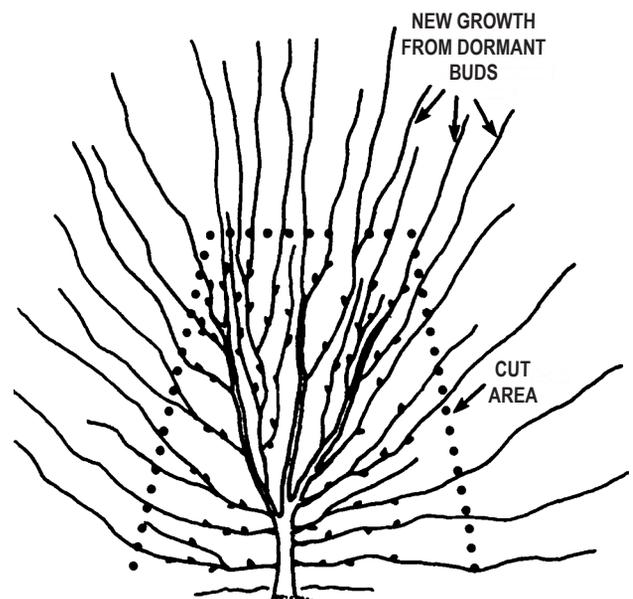


Figure 2. Allow the pruned plant to grow 12 to 18 inches in width and height; cut this growth back one-half. Repeat until desired height and width is attained. Bottom of plant should be wider than tops.

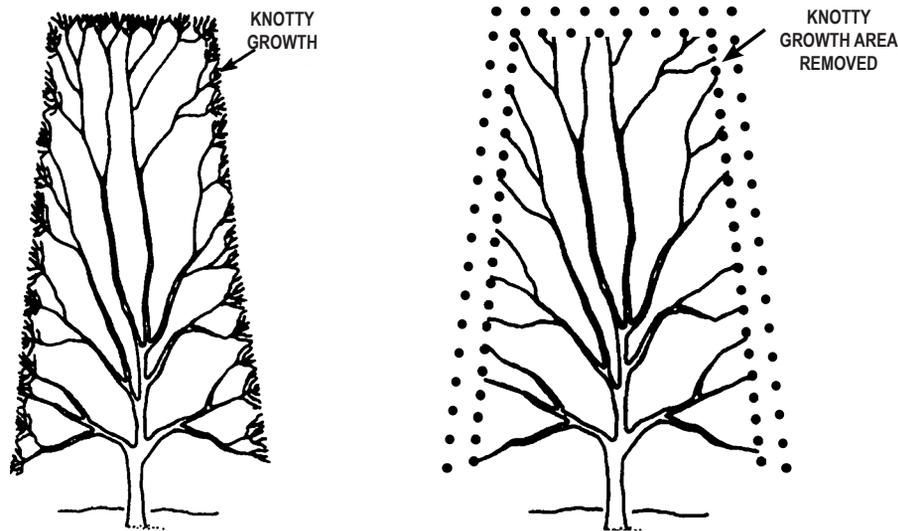


Figure 3. Pruning an established hedge in the same general area year after year results in leafless, knotty growths. Cutting behind this growth will encourage new stems and leaves..

#### Step 5. Subsequent Pruning to Encourage Fill-In:

Again allow the pruned plants to develop growth 12 to 18 inches long before cutting back this growth six to nine inches. Continue this type of pruning until you have attained the desired height and width. Your hedge should now be dense from ground level to the very top of the hedge.

#### Step 6. Pruning of the Established Hedge:

After hedge has attained the desired height and width, use hand or electric shears to keep a neat, orderly appearance. This shearing should be practiced whenever the new growth develops a length of three to four inches. The new growth will be soft and succulent and can easily be removed through shearing.

#### Step 7. Rejuvenating a Hedge which does not Produce a New Leaf Crop:

Shearing a hedge at the same height and width year after year will often discourage new stem growth. In this case, it will be necessary to cut in back of these knotty areas, usually two to three inches in from the top and sides. This should be done in early spring just before new growth emerges to take advantage of a quick fill in and to prevent sunburning. (Figure 3).

#### Step 8. Water and Fertilize to Encourage New Growth:

There is no substitute for proper watering and fertilizing to encourage rapid development of leaves and stems. Nitrogen fertilizer should be applied in early spring and again when the leaves fail to maintain dark green color. Ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) can be used at the rate of  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  pounds per 100 sq. ft. of basin surface. Water deeply to move the fertilizer into the root zone.

### Adapted from and replaces:

Fazio, S. 1983. *Pruning Hedges to Provide Screening*. University of Arizona Bulletin Q130. Tucson, AZ.

### References

Braun, H. and T. DeGomez, 2013. *Shrubs for Northern Arizona Above 6000 foot Elevations*. University of Arizona, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Bulletin, az1285. Tucson, AZ



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