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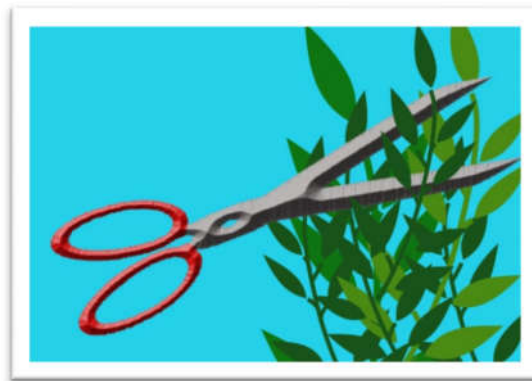
Planting and Nurturing

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Landscape Design: Suzanne Finger, Editor

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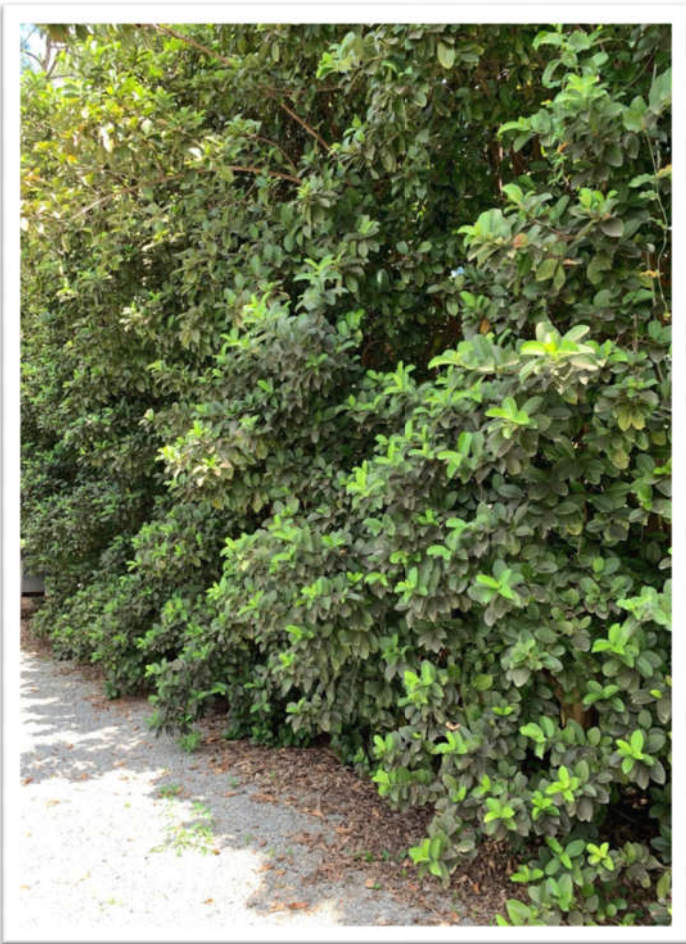
Hedging In

An All-Star Line-Up of Great Plants for Hedges

One question I field often is, “What’s a good plant to use for a hedge or screen?” We all have our reasons for wanting a wall of green. Sometimes, it’s to limit the neighbors’ view (I’ve learned not to ask my clients why in this case), or perhaps it is to limit the view *of* the neighbors (the reasons are usually freely given in this case). Outside of their usual duties as a visual buffer, hedges are a great way to soften a necessary boundary or define our outdoor spaces into “rooms.” On a smaller scale, a hedge may provide a neat edge to a wispy perennial planting, or create a dramatic shape in a formal parterre garden. Whatever the reason may be, there are many fabulous options I would like to discuss in this edition of the Landscape Design Newsletter.

Viburnum

Let’s start big and work our way down from there. One great go-to in our hot, humid landscape is the Viburnum. Sweet Viburnum (*Viburnum odoratissimum*) has been a long time favorite for creating a large screen or visual buffer. The hardy, coarse-textured plant takes to trimming well and can easily reach heights of twenty-five feet or taller. It can spread to fifteen feet, yet doesn’t mind getting close to its friends (four to five feet on-center) for a faster hedge while the plant is still young.



This versatile plant can be trimmed into a tidy, formal shape or hang loose for a softer, less-formal treatment. The photo to the left is the viburnum hedge that forms the northern edge of our property. I would love to say that its unruliness is due to my desire for a softer, more natural look and not the lack of attention and pruning; however, the later would be true. This planting stands at least 25 feet tall.

A little tighter, smaller form is the *odoratissimum's* cousin, *Viburnum tinus*. It's a plant worth looking into if you want something with a smaller habit. We've had good luck with it in our deep south climate, and it has proved an excellent alternative to the worn-out wax-leaf ligustrum.

Left: *Viburnum odoratissimum*

'Carolina Sapphire'

If you are looking for something that will grow in a hurry and create a soft, fine-textured background for the rest of your landscape, the 'Carolina Sapphire' Arizona Cypress (*Cupressus arizonica* 'Carolina Sapphire') is for you. Its blue-green color and cedar-like texture give the illusion that it is farther away than it really is. Perfect for a fast-growing visual screen, it makes a canvas to showcase the other colors in your landscape. Place a backdrop of 'Carolina Sapphire' behind a small lawn, and the lawn will seem to double in size.

Right: *Cupressus arizonica* 'Carolina Sapphire'



Podocarpus

What do you do if you don't have a lot of space, and yet you need something with a little height? Podocarpus comes running to the rescue in this case. Not only is it fun to say, but the podocarpus (*Podocarpus macrophyllus*) is a great plant with historic tenure in making hedges. It can be trimmed to a tight, narrow form and yet easily reach six feet tall, a good height for hiding things (unless your neighbors are pro basketball players). Don't be discouraged if your young podocarpus plants don't seem to want to stand up straight. The young branches of the podocarpus are a little weepy but stiffen with age. It won't be long until the plant behaves like it should and, after trimming, maintains an upright shape. It's sort of like training a puppy; the work is worth it in the end.



Above: *Podocarpus* Hedge

Sasanqua Camellia

A slower growing option, but one that can pack a colorful punch in the fall, is a sasanqua hedge. The fall-blooming *Camellia sasanqua* trims neatly into a defined hedge, or if you prefer to keep the shears in the shed, just let it go natural. The dark, glossy, evergreen leaves and dense growth habit make for a beautiful, year-round hedge while showcasing flowers in the fall. The different sasanquas sport blooms in many colors. Two of my favorite cultivars are the white blooming 'Mine-No-Yuki,' and the soft pink 'Cotton Candy.' The dwarf variety, 'Shi Shi Gashira,' is also a good choice for a small to medium-sized hedge with a reddish-pink blossom.



Above: *Camellia sasanqua* 'Mine-no-Yuki'

Boxwood

The classic boxwood hedge provides a versatile option for creating linear interest in the landscape. The romantic flair of a perennial bed with an untamed variety of colors and textures needs the definition of a small hedge to hem in its edges. The evergreen boxwood provides bones during the winter when the perennials are spent. A formal parterre or knot garden wouldn't exist without the boxwood as the medium to create dramatic lines and accents.



Above: Japanese Littleleaf Boxwood creates a defined, evergreen edge for colorful annuals

With the widening range of cultivars available, the perfect boxwood for the job is easier to find. Three major groups of boxwoods available in the nursery industry these days are Korean Boxwoods (*Buxus microphylla* var. *koreana*), the old English Boxwoods (*Buxus sempervirens*), and Japanese Littleleaf Boxwoods (*Buxus microphylla japonica*). Several varieties and cultivars exist within each of these groups. It pains me to say that the beautiful, cloud-forming English boxwood does not thrive in the deep south, and I envy our north Georgia friends who get to enjoy them. The Korean introductions are slower growing and have great potential for the smaller hedges. The Japanese Littleleaf is, by far, still my favorite for our soil, just because it is so hardy. It may take a little more trimming, but this workhorse is hard to beat.

Watch for the Harland Boxwood (*Buxus harlandii*) at garden centers as well. As a slow grower, I was hopeful for this introduction to take its place as a great small hedge plant. The beautiful, glossy, dark-green foliage is stunning and seems to resist Boxwood Blight well. The only downfall is it tends to produce a strong, exposed woody trunk. This can spoil the boxy, "full-to-the-ground" look needed in a hedge. Groundcover planted along the front can remedy this, hiding the trunk.

Hedges have held their place in garden history, performing many duties, both pragmatic and aesthetic. For the next time you need a hedge in your life, perhaps this newsletter has better equipped you with the facts you need to decide which plant to choose for the job.



All photos by Suzanne Finger