

Hedge Plants for the Upper Midwest

Many different woody plants can be used to create attractive hedges or screens, adding beauty and privacy to the home landscape. When planting a hedge, plants are spaced closer than normal so that they will grow together densely. Hedges can help define a space in the landscape or create a visual or physical barrier.

Hedges can generally be described as formal or informal. Formal hedges are trimmed or sheared in a geometrical shape so that the foliage forms a smooth plane. These hedges must be pruned one or more times per year. Informal hedges are pruned only minimally and the plants develop their normal growth habit. They may only need light maintenance pruning every two to three years.

The following list includes a number of shrubs and small trees that work well as hedges or screens. Many of these plants can be grown as either formal or informal hedges, but some are best left informal.

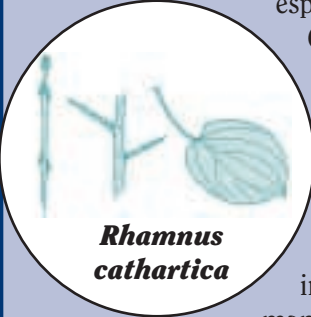
Amelanchier spp. **Amelanchier or** **Serviceberry**

There are a number of Amelanchier species and cultivars, and they all have lovely white flowers in the spring, edible purple-black fruit, and good fall color. Shrubby, lower growing cultivars and species such as 'Regent', 'Prince William',


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✓ Both common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) and glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*) have been sold extensively over the years, especially for use as hedges.


Columnar, or Tallhedge, glossy buckthorn has been very popular because its narrow, upright habit made it useful for screening in fairly narrow planting sites. Unfortunately, all of these buckthorns have proven to be invasive pests. They produce many seedling plants which are often found growing in cultivated landscapes and invading the understory of native woodlands. Buckthorn often crowds out more desirable plants and have become a serious weed problem in both urban and rural areas. Because of its invasiveness, buckthorn is no longer recommended for planting.



Rhamnus cathartica



Rhamnus frangula



Buckthorn

and thicket serviceberry (*A. canadensis*) are most useful for hedges.

Aronia melanocarpa **Black Chokeberry**

This hardy shrub is noted for its profusion of white spring flowers, glossy green leaves, black fruit, and bright red to burgundy fall color. Black Chokeberry tolerates a wide range of soil conditions. The variety *elata* and the cultivar "Autumn Magic" grow smaller than the species.

Berberis spp. **Barberry**

The dense, thorny growth of Barberries make them ideal for use as barriers. There are many cultivars available of Japanese Barberry (*B. thunbergii*) and Hybrid Barberries, including many with red, gold, or purple foliage. Most Barberries have attractive yellow flowers in spring and clusters of bright red fruit which adds color in fall and winter.





Buxus microphylla koreana (Korean Littleleaf Boxwood)

Buxus microphylla var. *koreana* Korean Littleleaf Boxwood

Boxwood's small evergreen leaves and dense growth habit have long made it a favorite for formal hedges and topiary where it can be pruned in very precise shapes. It also makes very attractive informal low hedges. The Korean variety of Littleleaf Boxwood is the most winter hardy and the best choice for northern areas. The cultivar 'Wintergreen' is quite hardy. These plants do best on east or north sides of the house and need protection from winter sun.

Cornus spp. Dogwood

Several species of shrub Dogwoods are suitable for hedge use. Red-stemmed Dogwood (*C. sericea*) is noted for its bright red winter stems. Tatarian Dogwood (*C. alba*) is similar,

with darker red stems. Both species also have varieties with yellow stems. There are also a number of Dogwood cultivars that have attractive variegated leaves such as European Variegated and "Ivory Halo." Shrub Dogwoods need to have the oldest stems pruned out every few years to improve their form and encourage good stem color, so they are best grown as informal hedges

Cotoneaster lucidus Hedge Cotoneaster

This shrub's upright, spreading branching pattern and dense growth make it a natural for hedges. It has glossy dark green leaves and bears small black fruit which stay on the plant from late summer into the winter. Hedge Cotoneaster tolerates fairly dry soils.

Euonymus alatus Winged Euonymus or Burning Bush

Noted for its eye-catching cerise-red fall color, Winged Euonymus has other ornamental features as well. During the growing season this shrub has clean, medium to dark green foliage. In winter, its corky stems and horizontally spreading branches add architectural definition to the landscape and can be particularly interesting in hedge form. The cultivar 'Compactus' has more compact, dense growth but is somewhat less cold hardy.

Hydrangea spp. Hydrangea

Smooth Hydrangea (*H. arborescens*) is a fairly low growing plant that can be grown as a low hedge or border plant. It has large clusters of white flowers in mid to late summer and has the advantage of being quite shade tolerant. The cultivar 'Annabelle' has especially large rounded flower clusters. Another Hydrangea that can be used for informal hedges is Panicle Hydrangea (*H. paniculata*). This is a large shrub that produces many upright, cone-shaped panicles of lacy white flowers in late summer. Good cultivar choices include 'Tardiva,' 'Pee Gee,' 'Kyushu,' and 'Unique.'

Juniperus spp. Juniper

Several Juniper species can be used for attractive evergreen hedges. Upright or wide-spreading cultivars of Chinese Juniper (*J. chinensis*), Rocky Mountain Juniper (*J. scopulorum*), and Eastern Red Cedar (*J. virginiana*) are the best choices. The foliage in shades of green to blue-silver adds winter interest, as do the glaucous blue berry-like cones produced on some varieties.

Pruning Formal Hedges

To remain dense and full, formal hedges should be pruned in a shape that allows sunlight to reach all of the foliage. The top of the hedge should be narrower than the bottom. This will prevent upper branches from shading out lower branches, which could otherwise result in sparse growth and leggy stems on the lower part of the hedge.

Philadelphus spp. **Mockorange**

Mockorange is valued for its profusion of fragrant white flowers produced in late spring to early summer. The plants, unfortunately, tend to have an untidy growth habit and benefit from regular pruning. Formal shearing greatly reduces flowering so is best reserved for cultivars such as the gold foliaged 'Aureus' which is grown more for the leaf color than for flowers. Some of the hardiest cultivars include 'Blizzard', 'Miniature Snowflake', and 'Snowgoose'.

Physocarpus opulifolius **Ninebark**

This large native shrub develops shredding bark on older stems. For hedge use, more compact forms such as 'Nanus' and the gold foliaged cultivars 'Darts Gold' and 'Nugget' are good choices. Clusters of white flowers brighten the plant in spring and the seedheads often have a nice reddish coloration in late summer.

Picea glauca **White Spruce**

For a formal evergreen hedge, White Spruce is a good choice. It has short, grey-green needles and tolerates shearing better than other spruce species. Black Hills Spruce (*Picea glauca* var. *densata*) has dark green needles and dense growth and can also be used for hedges. Any spruce species can be planted at close spacing to form a tall, informal screen or windbreak.

Pinus spp. **Pines**

Mugo Pine (*Pinus mugo*) and White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) both tolerate shearing well and make attractive formal hedges. Mugo Pine has a mounded growth habit and dark green needles. White Pine grows naturally as a single-trunked tree so it requires regular pruning to keep it



in a lower-growing hedge form. It has soft-textured light green to blue-green needles.

Prunus spp. **Cherries**

Two shrub type cherries that make good formal or informal hedges are Nanking Cherry (*Prunus tomentosa*) and Purpleleaf Sand Cherry (*Prunus x cistena*). Nanking Cherry is extremely cold hardy and has a profusion of white flowers in the spring followed by tart, bright red fruit in mid-summer. Purpleleaf Sand Cherry has lovely deep reddish-purple foliage that retains its color well all through the growing season. It bears light pink flowers in the spring.

Ribes alpinum **Alpine Currant**

This densely twiggy shrub makes an excellent low hedge. It can be sheared for a formal look but its tidy growth habit also makes it suitable for a low-maintenance informal hedge. Alpine Currant leafs out early in the spring and displays small, bright green leaves throughout the

growing season. The cultivar 'Green Mound' is a dwarf form with dense growth and good foliage qualities.

Spiraea spp. **Spirea**

There are many Spireas that can be used for hedges. They generally are most suited for informal hedges, since shearing will remove many of the flowers. Vanhoutte Spirea (*Spiraea vanhouttei*) is an old-fashioned favorite with tall, arching stems and a profusion of clusters of small white flowers in the spring. Threelobe Spirea (*Spiraea trilobata*) has similar flowers but is a smaller shrub; the cultivars 'Fairy Queen', 'Swan Lake', and 'Snow White' all form compact, rounded plants that are excellent for low, informal hedges. Grefsheim Spirea (*Spiraea x cinerea* 'Grefsheim') is another medium sized spirea with white flowers in early spring and good yellow-orange fall color. Japanese Spirea (*Spiraea japonica*) and Bumald Spirea (*Spiraea x bumalda*) are low-growing shrubs with dense, up-right growth and many flat clusters of white, pink, or rosy red flowers during the summer. There are several gold-leafed cultivars of these species also.

Syringa spp.

Lilacs

Lilacs are hardy, adaptable landscape plants that can readily be used for informal hedges. Common Lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) and its many hybrid cultivars, often called French Hybrid Lilacs, bear large clusters of sweetly fragrant flowers in a range of colors in the spring. They have large, dark green leaves and fairly dense growth, though they can become leggy with age. The Preston Lilacs (*S. x prestoniae*) and Early Flowering Lilacs (*S. x hyacinthiflora*) are extremely hardy and include many named cultivars with a range of flower colors. Chinese Lilac is a particularly good choice for hedges, since its medium sized leaves and twiggy growth make a dense screen. Miss Kim Lilac and Korean Dwarf Lilac are attractive, medium-height hedges with attractive rounded leaves and masses of pale lavender spring flowers.

Taxus spp.

Japanese Yews

In warmer climates yews are used extensively for hedges. They adapt very well to heavy pruning and are often used for formal sheared hedges. In colder Northern areas, however, only the hardiest cultivars should be used, and they should be sited carefully to avoid the foliar damage that can be caused by exposure to sun and wind during cold winters. Yews have handsome dark green needles and a dense growth habit. 'Tauntonii' is one of the hardiest Yews (*Taxus x media*). Japanese Yews (*T. cuspidata*) are also fairly hardy; the cultivar 'Capitata' has an upright pyramidal form and can be planted closely for an attractive informal or formal hedge.

Thuja occidentalis

Arborvitae or White Cedar

Hardy and easy to grow, Arborvitae is an excellent choice for evergreen hedges. It adapts well to shearing and can be pruned to precise shapes

for formal hedges. Its soft, feathery foliage also looks attractive when left informal. Cultivars such as 'Techny' and 'Emerald' (also known as 'Smaragd') have good winter color and can be grown as tall screens. Compact forms such as 'Holmstrup' and globe forms like 'Hetz Midget' and 'Little Gem' are good choices for low hedges.

Viburnum spp.

Viburnums

There are a number of different Viburnum species and cultivars, and many of them can be grown as informal hedges. American Cranberry-bush Viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*) provides lacey clusters of

white flowers in spring, persistent bright red fruit, and orange, red, and burgundy fall color. There are several compact cultivars of this shrub that are particularly good for hedges. Arrowwood Viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*) has a rounded, upright form, white flowers followed by blue-black fruits, and the advantage of being fairly shade tolerant. Wayfaring Tree Viburnum (*V. lantana*) and the related hybrid 'Emerald Triumph' have dense growth, leathery dark green leaves that may develop reddish fall color, and colorful clusters of fruit that turn from red to black.

