

Hedgerows

Hedgerows are a landscaping option, often overlooked in Canada, other than the familiar cedar hedge. The countryside hedgerow, most well-known as a British feature, could easily be replicated in our suburban or even urban areas. Hedgerows are most often considered as an alternative to a fence but as they can come in many sizes, colours and shapes, they can offer much more than an inanimate enclosure. While they do take time to grow and fill in and can take up more space (and for this reason the cedar fastigate shape is the most popular), if there is room, hedgerows can offer a variety of landscaping effects at varying price points and offer habitat and food for wildlife including birds. They can also be a symbolic *Care for Creation* addition to faith community landscapes. Hedgerows can offer spring and summer blooms, ripe berries and seeds and even winter interest, instilling hope, comfort and a sense of blessing.

Hedgerows Can Be Used for:

- Definition to a property border or corner of lawn.
- A backdrop for a deep yard and/or bare landscaping.
- A windbreak for congregants movement into building.
- A low-maintenance option for a sloped area helping with erosion.
- A linear buffer for buildings to protect from prevailing winds.
- A sound barrier for noise from high traffic areas or busy locations.
- Screening for private areas and along property edges.
- Definition of spaces for infill development.
- Creation of an outdoor “room” or intimate space.
- Design of a visual line or corridor to lead visitors to specific areas.
- A visual transition from tall features such as trees, trellis & vines, buildings to ground level gardens.

Hedgerows Offer:

- A softscape experience rather than a hardscape – the texture and green colours provide a much more soft background rather than a flat, inert hard structure of a fence.
- A transitioning backdrop with a variety of colours and textures from foliage, blooms, berries and seeds or evergreens reflecting the seasons adorned with rain, ice or snow.

- Animation from wild visitors (pollinators, birds, chipmunks) and much needed biodiversity to the stretches of hard pavement, ubiquitous lawn and building structures found in urban environments.
- A low-maintenance option for landscaping larger areas with various options of semi-private to full-privacy depending on the choice of shrub (deciduous vs evergreen).
- A low cost solution depending on the needs of the faith community. Is there a need for a fence or definition of space immediately or can the landscaping feature be allowed to develop and grow-in?

Hedgerows for Cemeteries

- Hedgerow softscaping can mark the borders of the cemetery/memorial grounds.
- A line of shrubs can create a peaceful place within the grounds for those seeking a private spot.
- A native hedgerow can offer a reminder of the circle of life and provide comfort to visitors.
- Shrubs can define a private corner that features a fountain, tribute and/or memorial planting.

Ecological Benefits

Hedgerows provide many ecological benefits for a resilient urban area and diverse ecosystem. Adding a variety of landscaping features could be considered similar to the mixture of natural habitats





found in a more rural wild settings. Hedgerows can provide needed corridors for both flora and fauna, which allow for the genetic health of species by ensuring that isolated groups can connect to each other. These “green genetic bridges” work for not only land creatures and for plant seeds to be transported further afield but also make it easier for birds to move safely in urban areas. They are a mini-ecosystem unto themselves even offering shade and cooler climates to those that can benefit.

Hedgerows can provide many of the basic needs of species including food, shelter, cover and passage from one location to another, such as movement towards a water body or to a different locations if a species is threatened due to land changes or lack of resources in one area. These corridors can also be nesting locations and draw in wildlife at different times of the year depending on what is blooming or fruiting. Flowers attract insects, which then become a draw for avian insectivores. Seeds and fruits offer nutrients to many species. Hedgerows also help protect soil from erosion and reduce loss of moisture from the ground.

If you have larger property and/or if there are green spaces close to your property, consider helping to strengthen the resilience of your local natural areas by creating a corridor.

How to Install a Hedgerow

The Outdoor Greening Primer has a very clear outline of the steps for retrofitting or installing new features to your property. It includes reviewing your goals and resources and then provides details on how to prepare the area and proper planting techniques for perennials, shrubs and trees. In terms of a hedgerow, the main considerations are:

Space/Location

- **Size/Width:** Many native shrubs need a minimum of two to three square meters or wider. Keep this in mind when determining location for planting.
- **Height:** Shrubs typically can be the same width as height or they can be taller. Keep full grown height in mind when you determine the location.

- **Location:** The amount of sun and the type of soil will help determine the best shrubs for the location that has been chosen. There are native varieties for all types of conditions.

Maintenance level

- Available space will determine whether you will have to prune height or width.
- Desired look will determine whether the hedge can look a bit messy and wild.
- Add vines to make the hedge denser but choose carefully if you want little maintenance.
- Include smaller shrubs at the base or wildflowers to help define lower space.
- Mulch can help keep area under low branches tidy to decrease need for weeding.

A hedgerow of mixed shrubs is best as it will offer diversity and provide variety throughout the growing season. If the desire is to have something more symmetrical and balanced choose three to five shrubs and repeat in a pattern. Some shrubs get extra benefit from this type of grouping as there is a need for a male and female plant for fertilization such as Winterberry, Hollies and Sweet Gale. Have a knowledgeable staff at a garden centre confirm the gender if you are purchasing this type of plant. You may also want to consider time of bloom and seed/fruit and colours/shapes to add as much visual interest throughout the year as you can. This resilient mix of plants also builds in redundancy if one shrub doesn't survive and it needs to be replaced.

Planting and Other Considerations:

Density can be created by doing one row of shrubs or two rows side by side and then planting the shrubs closer than the recommended width so that they grow into each other. This denser shrubbery can offer better cover to birds also.

Another option to add more density and diversity is to add some vines so that they grow into the hedge. Virginia Creeper, while native, can be vigorous and would need annual pruning. If less maintenance is desired consider an annual like

Wild Cucumber or other easy-going vines such as the Allegheny Vine or Groundnut if you don't want to be cutting them back all the time.

The easiest way to prepare the location is to do lasagna gardening. Full details are in the Outdoor Greening Primer but to start if there is lawn, cut the grass very short. Water it and then cover with newspaper or cardboard. This is then followed by layers of soil, compost and more newspaper. This type of layering will help discourage undesired plants and keep moisture in the ground which benefits new plantings.

Take care of your new shrubs and provide them with lots of water their first year. Even drought tolerant plants will need some extra care. The best time to water is in the mornings before the hot sun rays start to evaporate the water. The new hedgerow will need extra support until it is well established.

In urban areas, lighting in more public high traffic areas will be key to address concerns of safety and a consideration of the balance between busy corridors and quieter spaces will help create some access for wildlife also.

Detailed planting instructions for shrubs are available in the Outdoor Greening Primer.

Maintenance – Pruning

If you do decide to do pruning of your hedge row, ensure that the hedge is thicker at the base and narrower at the top so that all parts of the plant can receive sunlight. Also prune out old dying stems annually.

Avoid bird nesting season when trimming in the spring. While some shrubs benefit from being pruned right after they bloom, if there is interest in creating bird nesting habitat, choose native perennials that benefit from a later pruning in the summer or fall.

Links / Further Info:

Canadian Wildlife Federation – Hedgerows :
Information on hedge rows and recommendations on native shrubs
www.cwf-fcf.org/en/resources/DIY/outside/hedgerows.html

The Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club – Fletcher Wildlife Gardens :
Information on hedge rows and recommendations on native shrubs
www.ofnc.ca/fletcher

