

Planning for Outdoor Privacy

Many homeowners use their porches, decks, and yards as extensions of their living space. To feel comfortable, however, they need privacy. Walls and fences create privacy, but can be too confining and expensive. Landscaping for privacy using “living screens” provides another alternative.



When creating a living privacy fence, make sure to pick plants that are appropriate for your property in terms of hardiness, sun, and moisture. You may want to consult a landscape professional who is well acquainted with the characteristics of the various plants that are best suited to your climate and soil. Younger plants will be cheaper and easier to install, but if you need privacy quickly and are willing to spend a little more, buy larger ones for quicker results.

CONSIDER THESE POPULAR METHODS TO ACHIEVE GREATER PRIVACY:

Trellises: Plants grown on trellises create an effective screen that allows light and air to pass through. Trellises are very handy because they take up very little space. Make sure the trellis is sturdy enough for the plant you grow on it.

Hedges: Hedges can be as tall or short as you like, and can fit in small or large spaces. Select shrubs or trees that won't grow taller or wider than you need.

Trees: Carefully positioned small trees, especially those that branch out at the base, also help create privacy. Magnolias, flowering dogwoods, Japanese maple, Japanese tree lilac, and birch are good options.

Outdoor Rooms: You can build a private “outdoor room” in your yard with greenery instead of solid walls. Use posts covered with vines to establish the boundaries and enclose the sides with trellises, planters, shrubs, or perennials.

Another option for screening your property is an earthen berm or mound with plantings, which serves as a living hillside. The berm should not be too narrow or steep, because a broad, gently rising area blends with the yard more naturally.

Privacy landscaping is an effective, natural way to increase the privacy of your yard and maximize your enjoyment of the outdoors. Done correctly, it can increase the value of your property without breaking the bank.

Stop Topping

Now that we're into the growing season and trees are fully leafed out, many homeowners are tempted to top them in an effort to curtail growth and diminish their size. This practice, which literally removes the top of a tree, is never a good idea.

WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT IT?

Topping, also known as stubbing, dehorning or heading, actually causes a tree's growth rate to increase rather than decrease. This results in numerous long, skinny shoots growing back rapidly, creating a need for even more cutting year after year.

Topping can lead to hazardous conditions in your landscape as well. When a tree is topped, it becomes more vulnerable to wood-rotting organisms. Rotted limbs may fall and cause serious injury or property damage.

It also goes without saying that topped trees are unattractive. This can take away from the overall beauty of your landscape while decreasing your property value.

We urge you to avoid topping your trees at all costs. This extreme practice does much more harm than good, and should never take the place of proper pruning by a trained technician. Regular, professional pruning is much better for your trees, improving their health and appearance while decreasing the potential for wind or storm damage.



Not only does topping endanger the health of trees, it also destroys the beauty of a tree's natural branch structure.