

Boxwood Tips, Uses, Varieties and Topiary



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Buxus, which you might know as boxwoods, is one of the most popular hedging plants grown worldwide. In a previous guide (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LbDkOtubk7c>) we took a look at some methods you could use to propagate your own boxwoods from cuttings, be it in a commercial plant production nursery or for hobbyist purposes. In this eBook we are going to take a more intimate look at boxwoods, discussing some growing tips, uses, varieties and adding value to your plants through trimming into topiary forms.

Let's dive in and start with some popular uses for boxwoods.



Tips for Growing Boxwoods

Boxwood aficionado and master grower Paul Saunders has two strong horticultural beliefs: ‘In horticulture, variety is everything (almost!), and two, in boxwood, protection is everything (almost!)’. These two rules form the basis of successfully growing boxwoods.

To help guarantee your chances of beautiful, lush and healthy boxwoods pick the cultivar best suited to your needs. This means considering your climate, planting space, and aesthetic requirements. If you are a producer of boxwoods, this means considering the easiness of which buyers will grow your plants in addition to the perceived beauty of the plants, thereby allowing you to cater to both the practical and superficial needs of the clients.

If you are growing your boxwoods for personal use, then your climatic needs will be on top of your list of considerations. If you have an especially cold environment, then Sheridan cultivars such as ‘Green Mound’, ‘Green Mountain’, and ‘Green Velvet’ could work for you (Zone 4b). You must also take into account your soil characteristics, as many boxwood varieties are susceptible to root rot. ‘Graham Blandy’ is especially sensitive in wet soils, ‘Dee Runk’ should instead be considered in these conditions.

Rule number two reiterates the importance of protecting your boxwoods from harsh conditions. By exploiting some of these rules you can also create a microclimate that might be suitable for otherwise no-go varieties. Planting boxwoods next to established trees can help suck up excess water in the rootzone and provide some relief from hot, direct sun. If you’re in the southern hemisphere, south facing slopes are often best suited to boxwoods, while the opposite is true in the northern hemisphere. You should also be wary of overfertilising young boxwoods towards the end of the summer. Excess nitrogen will encourage a flush of young foliage that won’t have time to acclimatise before winter freeze and thaw cycles hit.

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Uses in the Landscape, Varieties and Topiary

Hedging

When mature, boxwood hedges can make effective, and attractive, fences. While it may take a few growing seasons to create a uniform fence, it is otherwise rather easy to grow. Tall varieties can be selected if you wish to grow majestic, impressive hedges that can also act as a makeshift wall. 'John Baldwin' is a great variety for tall hedges. At maturity it grows up to 10 feet tall and 3.5 feet wide with an overall columnar structure, with the plant fattening as it grows. Boxwood 'Suffruticosa' is a smaller variety, especially popular as an edging plant used to define walkways and flower beds. 'Suffruticosa' grows up to 4 feet tall and 5 feet wide.



Topiary

Their dense growth habit makes boxwoods the perfect plants to train into topiary. First practiced in Ancient Rome, topiary is the general term referring to the practice of trimming and training plants into distinctive shapes. Whether it be in the landscape or in pots, boxwood topiaries can take almost any form imaginable. Elegant forms will add a touch of class to formal gardens, while whimsical animal shapes are great in theme parks and gardens frequented by young children. ‘Dee Runk’ is a great cultivar with an upright growth habit, and with minimal pruning the plant can easily be trained into a Christmas tree-like form. ‘Green Mountain’ is perfect when a conical form is desired. ‘Suffruticosa’ is a great all-rounder for many topiary forms. Boxwoods can also be trained as miniature trees. ‘Grace Hendrik Phillips’ is what’s known as ‘a very dwarf cultivar’ and only grows 1.5 feet tall and 3.5 feet wide, making it the perfect bonsai specimen.



Pot plants

Whether a minimalist approach is preferred with only one or two pots on a porch, or if multiple pots are clustered together, boxwoods can be a very exciting pot plant. As perennials, you can enjoy years of greenery with little maintenance required. Tall varieties like 'Graham Blandy' make for a striking frame to doorways. 'Justin Brouwers' is a small variety with a compact, mounding habit, perfect for smaller pots. If you're looking for a uniquely coloured boxwood, consider planting 'Elegantissima' with its variegated leaf colour. It makes a great Christmas display with its white tipped leaves. While it can reach heights of up to 12 feet, vigorous pruning can help keep 'Elegantissima' compact for pot plants.



Window boxes

Add sophistication and grace to your windows by incorporating miniature boxwoods into the boxes. Not only do they look beautiful from the outside, but when viewed from the inside they add a sense of calm and refreshment to the indoors too. You will want to look for the smallest of the small varieties that are happy to grow in compact window boxes. ‘Morris Dwarf’ grows up to 3 ft tall and 4.5 feet wide, but can be kept smaller if pruned regularly. ‘Morris Midget’ is one of the most compact dwarf varieties and one of the best performers too, reaching heights of only 18 inches tall and 3-4 feet wide. ‘Wee Willie’® is another great option for window boxes, potentially being more easy to source than the other two varieties. Even though they are perennials, you can change up the look every season by adding different annuals around the boxwoods.

Mazes

Combining their ability to function as both hedges and topiary, showcase your boxwood as mazes. Whether it be in a small, formal garden or a part of a massive landscape, mazes make for an impressive spectacle to behold. Not only are they pleasing to the eye, but they can be exploited by business-savvy growers at restaurants, hotels, function venues and other business focussed on attracting as many customers as possible. ‘Sempervirens’, ‘John Baldwin’ and ‘Suffruticosa’ varieties are great for tall mazes, while ‘Small Leaf Wintergreen’ is suitable for short-walled mazes.

