

Boxwood (*Buxus* species)

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Summary:

Foliage: Evergreen broadleaf

Height: 5 to 20 feet (depending on species and cultivar)

Spread: 5 to 20 feet (depending on species and cultivar)

Shape: Upright mound to round to upright narrow (depending on species and cultivar).

Boxwoods are the classic border plant for lining paths, and driveways, placed on either side of a door to frame an entryway, and for dividing gardens into smaller spaces. They are generally formal in appearance due to their symmetrical rounded or oval shapes and dense uniform canopy. There are several species and many cultivars to choose to meet size and shape criteria. Boxwoods are not without problems (diseases, insects, environmental stresses) so to avoid stressing plants which predisposes them to problems, make sure to plant them where they get some shade from the afternoon summer sun and protection from winter winds. Boxwoods should also be mulched and irrigated during periods of drought.

Plant Needs:

Zone: 5 to 9 (depending on species and cultivar)

Light: Partial shade to full sun

Moisture: Wet, moist, to dry

Soil Type: Sandy, loam, clay

pH Range: 3.5 to 8.0

Functions:

Suggested uses for this plant include border, hedge, foundation, and in mass. In general, deer do not browse on boxwood, therefore this plant is a very valuable landscape species for areas prone to deer damage.

Planting Notes:

Plant in well-drained soil.

Plant at same depth as grown in nursery.

To have good looking and healthy boxwood, it is imperative to site plants so that they have:

- shade in the afternoon to protect them from harsh summer sun
- and protection from winter wind.

Care:

Tolerates pruning and shearing; prune dead branches anytime. Easily pruned to any desired shape. Keep plants mulched. Irrigate during periods of drought.

Old boxwoods can be rejuvenated (providing they are healthy) by pruning plants to about 3 feet tall. Leave some foliage on the plant. Pruned plants will look unsightly (bare and odd-shaped) for two years or so but will start to look good in the third and fourth year.

Problems:

Susceptible to many insects and diseases including boxwood leaf minor, boxwood psyllid, boxwood mite, foliage and twig blights, and *Phytophthora* root rot.

Alternatives:

Consult local garden centers, historic or public gardens and arboreta regarding cultivars and related species that grow well in your area.

Species and cultivars of *Buxus*:

'*Arborescens*' has an upright mounded form that, when old, can be 25 feet tall.

'Suffruticosa' (English boxwood) has a dense canopy and a nice billowy effect. It is a very slow grower. This cultivar has the strong 'aroma' that has been likened to cat urine. Some people wane nostalgic while others flee the plants when smelling this cultivar.

Related species:

Buxus microphylla (Korean or littleleaf boxwood). There are two varieties of this species offered at nurseries. *B. microphylla* var. *japonica* is best suited to warmer zones (7 – 8) and var. *koreana* is best suited to colder zones (5 – 6). There are several cultivars within each variety.

Mr. Paul Saunders of Saunders Brothers Nursery, a grower of boxwoods in Nelson County, VA, has been conducting boxwood trials for many years. They recommend the following cultivars noted as the "Best of the Best" in their website

(http://www.saundersbrothers.com/boxwood_trials2.htm#Chapter%202). Cultivars are grouped according to habit.

Upright cultivars

- B. sempervirens* 'Dee Runk'
- B. sempervirens* 'Fastigiata'
- B. microphylla* 'John Baldwin'

Very dwarf cultivars

- B. microphylla* 'Grace Hendrick Phillips'
- B. microphylla* 'Green Pillow'
- B. microphylla* var. *japonica* 'Morris Dwarf'
- B. microphylla* var. *japonica* 'Morris Midget'

Slightly dwarf to medium size cultivars

- B. sinica* var. *insularis* 'Nana'
- B. sempervirens* 'Jensen'
- B. sinica* var. *insularis* 'Justin Browsers';
- B. sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa'

Sheridan cultivars (hybrids of *B. sempervirens* and *B. microphylla*)

- B. x* 'Green Mound'
- B. x* 'Green Mountain'
- B. x* 'Green Velvet'

Medium size cultivars

- B. sempervirens* 'Elegantissima'
- B.* 'Glencoe' (Chicagoland Green™)
- B. microphylla* var. *japonica* 'Green Beauty'
- B. microphylla* 'Jim's Tru Spreader'
- B. sempervirens* 'Vadar Valley'
- B. sinica* var. *insularis* 'Wintergreen' (Big Leaf)
- B. sinica* var. *insularis* 'Wintergreen' (Little Leaf)
- B. sempervirens* 'Arborescens'
- B. sempervirens* 'Elizabeth H. Inglis'

Comments:

Boxwoods are popular broadleaf evergreen shrubs in Virginia with numerous cultivars to serve many garden and landscape uses. They give the landscape a formal look, and if planted and cared for correctly, they are long-lived plants that are very attractive. The fact that deer do not like to eat boxwoods makes them a very useful landscape plant in deer prone areas.

This material was developed by Carol Ness as part of the Interactive Design and Development Project funded by the Kellogg Foundation.