Good Hedges Make Good Neighbors

Photo by Donna Legare: An evergreen mixed border provides the backdrop for hydrangeas.

Donna Legare is co-owner of Native Nurseries and a member of the advisory committee of University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension, http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu/

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We have great neighbors on either side of us, but we do love feeling as if we are “in the woods” in our very private in-town backyard, with no neighbors in sight. My landscaping advice to new homeowners is to plant a hedge between them and their neighbors, for hedges really do make good neighbors. Do it now and before long, you too will have your own private refuge. A hedge provides privacy for you and a refuge for wildlife. It reduces the amount of lawn to mow and it increases the value of a home.

Three of my favorite hedge plants are wax myrtle, Ocala anise and sweet viburnum. Wax myrtle is fast growing and prefers sun or light shade. Female plants have waxy gray berries that are devoured by yellow-rumped warblers and ruby-crowned kinglets. Ocala anise, with its pleasantly fragrant bright green leaves, thrives in the shade and grows fairly fast. If you need a very fast growing hedge, try sweet viburnum, which does well in sun or shade.

You may prefer a mixed border or hedgerow. Our private back yard is enclosed by a variety of shade tolerant plants – a mixture of what was there when we moved in and what we added over the years. It includes sasanqua camellia, sweet viburnum, azalea, podocarpus, Ocala anise, Florida anise, needle palm and agarista. These shrubs thrive beneath a canopy of pine, sweetgum, liveoak, dogwood and Japanese magnolia. Birds and other wildlife are very comfortable moving along these corridors of plants that form the perimeter of our yard.
If we were in more sun, we would plant yaupon holly, dwarf Burford holly, American holly, red cedar and southern magnolia to help create a buffer. All bear fruit that is relished by birds. Loropetalum, with its interesting purplish foliage and wispy pink springtime flowers, is another good choice for a sunny hedgerow.

It may seem counterintuitive to clip your hedge when you are trying to grow it for privacy, but if you will trim off up to half of the new growth for the first few years, your hedge will be thicker and bushier as it grows. Fertilize your new plants lightly with an organic, slow-release fertilizer for the first few growing seasons and water regularly. Once established, your hedge should not need to be watered except during extreme droughts. Natural leaf fall and mulch should suffice for fertilizer.

Get started on creating your own private refuge. Plant a hedge or mixed border today!

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