

Creating a Hedge, Rich in Texture and Wildlife Value



*Photo by Donna Legare: A mixed border hedge provides privacy for you and cover for wildlife.
Landscape drawing by Jody Walthall: A suitable plan for a hedge planting under pines and oaks.*

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The first advice I give to new homeowners is to plant a hedge along their property's boundaries. In several years, it will close in, giving them privacy and providing a corridor for wildlife to move safely around the property.

A hedge can consist of several shrubs of the same species or a mixture of a variety of trees and shrubs. The latter provides greater diversity for wildlife and more interest for you.

When we moved into our Betton Hills home nearly twenty years ago, the edges of the property had already been planted by the previous owner. We were the beneficiary of thirty years of growth of beautiful sasanqua camellia, podocarpus, azalea and nandina which thrived under the shade of tall pine, oak and sweetgum. Over the years we removed the invasive nandina, replacing it with native evergreen shrubs such as agarista, needle palm, bluestem palmetto and Florida anise. We also encouraged the growth of deciduous shrubs planted by the birds along this border – American beautyberry and pokeweed. Both provide autumn color and a feast for the birds.

Planting native plants is one of the most important things you can do in your yard to benefit native wildlife. In his book *Bringing Nature Home*, entomologist David Tallamy explains that most native insects cannot or will not use alien (non-native) plants for food and rely instead on native plants. Since insects are the base of the food chain for birds and other wildlife, the importance of planting natives cannot be overemphasized. From my

own personal observations, I surmise that every native plant is used in some way by wildlife, from invertebrates to mammals.

If you are starting with a more-or-less barren yard with few plants, begin by selecting a few sun tolerant trees that will grow tall and provide future shade. Depending on the size of your yard and the soil conditions, you might select live oak, longleaf pine, Florida sugar maple, tulip poplar, winged elm, swamp chestnut oak or other large shade tree. Add some evergreen trees or shrubs that will also tolerate sun. You could try yaupon holly, silver saw palmetto, Walter's viburnum and wax myrtle. Plant some blueberries and a few smaller trees such as sassafras, hawthorn or sparkleberry.

Create one large bed by mulching heavily with pine straw or leaves between the plants. Placing cardboard or thick layers of newspaper beneath the mulch will help kill sod and weeds. The paper will eventually decompose, adding nutrients to the soil.

Give everything a few years to grow and then you can add semi-shade loving plants such as flowering dogwood, oakleaf hydrangea and native azalea. Eventually you will have a privacy hedge with rich texture and excellent wildlife food value.

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I am submitting an attached landscape drawing of a mixed hedgerow that would be suitable under the shade of large pines and oaks. Drawing by Jody Walthall

I am also submitting a photo of a mixed privacy hedge, also under the shade of large pines and oaks. Photo by Donna Legare

Feel free to use either or none.