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Cedars & Global Warming

Planting time for Cedars (arborvitae) is now, here are some hints; hedges for Oceanside here on Vancouver Island; and Global Warming's effect on gardening!
by *Art Drysdale*

by **Art Drysdale**

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Art Drysdale, a life-long resident of Toronto and a horticulturist well known all across Canada, is now a resident of Parksville, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, just north of Nanaimo. He has renovated an old home and has a new garden there. His radio gardening vignettes are heard in south-western Ontario over two radio stations: Easy 101 FM out of Tillsonburg at 2 PM weekdays and CD98.9 FM out of Norfolk County at 11:40 AM weekdays.

Art also has his own website at <http://www.artdrysdale.com>



April 20, 2008



Above, a hedge of eastern Cedar (Arborvitae) showing the damage inflicted by the deer on Vancouver Island. I did not mention that problem to George Gorringer as I know he was writing from Ontario where the deer populations are not nearly as dense yet. Below, my deck here in Parksville with a row of Noble privet growing in the tall containers at the far right. Author photos.



George Gorringer wrote recently, from within the AM740 listening area with a question that could be quite common, and thus worth answering here: "I am about to plant 5-6 ft Emerald Cedars as a hedge and have 3 questions. #1 How close should each tree be planted in connection to the next one? #2 What is required to prepare the hole for each tree including materials? #3 What is required to maintain my hedge in the future? Thank you kindly for any assistance you can give me to complete a successful new hedge. Your direct Email instructions to each of the above questions will be appreciated."

Yours are common questions at this time of year. The #1 question is something you basically have to answer yourself, based on whether you want instant screening as soon as the shrubs are planted, or are willing to wait several years for them to fill in. Basically you are better to plant them about 75 – 90 cm (30 in to 3 ft.) apart and allow them to grow together, but you may wish to set them closer to 50 - 60 cm (19 in. - 2 ft.) so that you have total screening much sooner.

Question #2 also is dependent on your own circumstances—soil type etc. Cedars (*Arborvitae* [Thuja]) certainly like an organic, open loose soil that tends to slightly damp rather than dry. I would dig a trench that will easily accommodate the soil balls and mix in peat moss, Coir, home compost, leaf mould etc. (not necessarily all of these) in the bottom and along the sides after the plants are placed at their proper height. Be sure you also include at least 50% of your own soil with what you are surrounding the soil balls. The only fertilizer I would include would be Blood Meal (not Blood & Bone Meal) mixed with the other 'ingredients'.

I would not fertilize them immediately, but once they've been in a month or so I would spray them with something like the liquid Cedar Feeder (30-10-10) that a number of suppliers sell. [The powder/granules are mixed with water and applied with a hose-end sprayer.]

They should definitely be planted during April, but if the new growth starts to emerge before you can get them planted, I would wait until after that new growth has matured (hardened).

A soaker hose placed along the base of the plants would allow you to water them regularly, as needed. Thanks for your interest.

Corbin Mitchell of nearby Coombs, wrote a way back in mid-March with an interesting question: "I was googling looking (unsuccessfully) for some seeds for the Amur Privet bush. I understand that this is a fast growing hedge plant that is suitable for the climate here in QB. After checking the nurseries in Nanaimo, looking on eBay, and checking on the internet, I have been able to find both seeds and cuttings in the US and UK, and some outrageously priced cuttings here in Canada, but no seeds available in Canada. I realize that you have retired and although I live in the Coombs area, I have been reluctant to contact you and impose upon your retirement. I decided to email you and if you so wish, you can respond. If not I will understand that there comes a point in retirement where a person backs away from the many requests for help you must receive. Can you think of any place where a person would be able to obtain these seeds? If a person ordered those from the UK or US do you see a challenge with customs etc? Many thanks."

I have several comments Corbin! First, why on earth are you considering the Amur privet which is a hardy shrub all right, and makes a good hedge, but there are ever so many other plants that most gardening people would consider superior. For example, you might consider the evergreen or Noble privet (*Ligustrum japonicum* 'Nobilis') or Portuguese laurel (*Prunus lusitanica*).

Both can be grown from seed, the privet being somewhat easier I would think than the laurel. Cuttings or even layers will work for both as well. Seeds or cuttings of both should be readily available here--all you need to do is find someone who already has a hedge and get the seeds at the right time. Or, the same applies to cuttings.


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Not knowing just where this hedge is to go, and what it is meant to accomplish (screen undesirable views, keep animals out, etc.) it is difficult to make specific recommendations, but I think you would be much better off with one of the two mentioned, although there are many other shrubs that will make a good hedge (formal or informal) here in this climate.

And by the way, I have not really retired at all. I still carry out most of the same activities here as I did while in Toronto. But thank you for your thoughts in any case.

Finally this week, the National Wildlife Federation in the U.S. has issued a report on Global warming. "As gardeners, we are both guardians and stewards of our environment," says Patty Glick, author of the report and Global Warming Specialist for the Federation. 'There are many simple and thoughtful ways we can manage our gardens that can make an enormous difference in reducing the impacts of global warming.'

"A report from international climate scientists released in February of 2007 projects that the Earth's average temperature will rise by 4-11 degrees before the end of this century if our dependency on fossil fuels continues unabated. Another report from this same prestigious group of scientists says that changes are happening faster than expected and the harmful effects of global warming on daily life are already apparent.

"As any gardener knows, even just one degree difference between 32 and 33 degrees Fahrenheit over a period of time can make a huge difference in a garden. Scientists are now finding what many gardeners have already been noticing; earlier leaf out and bloom times, earlier emergence of butterflies and other insects, and arrival of new bird species at the backyard feeder.

"Many of the 'hardiness zone maps' that gardeners rely on to identify which plants to choose for their gardens are already being adjusted to account for the impacts of global warming. The Arbor Day Foundation recently shifted Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and part of Michigan from Zone 5 to a warmer Zone 6 along with other zone changes."

The report includes many other observations and suggestions including stressing the need to plant more native plants, which as far as I am concerned is a ridiculous idea. I don't oppose native plants, but a good case can be made for the need to seek out more non-native plants from areas such as northern China that will grow well in our climates here. I'll leave further quotes from the National Wildlife Federation's report, along with additional commentary, until another article here.

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