

Plant a 'living fence' to beautify yard

A hedge can be an attractive asset to your property but does require your time and effort to maintain its beauty. If you choose to plant a hedge on your property, select a type and species that suits your needs, says Extension Horticulturist Burke McNeill, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food soils and crops branch, Milton, Ont.

Siberian elm (*Ulmus pumila*), for example, can be a good hedge plant if you are prepared to prune it very frequently and if the root system does not interfere with your plans for the rest of the yard.

On the other hand, white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) can be maintained with a minimum of effort and has a fairly confined root system.

Many types of hedges are available and almost any tree or shrub can be pruned into

a hedge if you desire something out of the ordinary.

But shrub-type plants with small leaves are usually best. Privets, cotoneasters, Siberian elm, spireas and many of the evergreens are a few of the most popular types. Cost of plants and the length of the hedge you require will also dictate the type you select.

Most nurseries now produce transplanted stock for hedging. These plants are larger and satisfy the desire of many gardeners to own a good-sized hedge in the first year.

But if you are not in a hurry, choose seedling plants. These are excellent for starting a hedge, cost much less, have a better chance of survival and will grow much faster.

Planting distance is generally 50 centimetres to 60 centimetres (18 inches to 24

inches) apart but you may plant closer together or further apart, as you wish. But 50 cm (18 in.) is generally the ideal distance for most hedge plants.

The rate of growth and the ultimate size of the species you select is also an important factor here, McNeill says. Boxwood should be planted about 30 cm (12 in.) apart while Siberian elm can be planted 60 cm (24 in.) apart to produce a good tight hedge in the shortest period of time.

When planting hedge plants, follow the same procedure as for any other tree or shrub. Prepare the soil by adding peat moss or manure or replace the soil with new top soil. Apply fertilizer, if required, either before the soil is prepared or after planting is completed; never place fertilizer in the hole or trench next to the roots. Water

thoroughly after planting is completed.

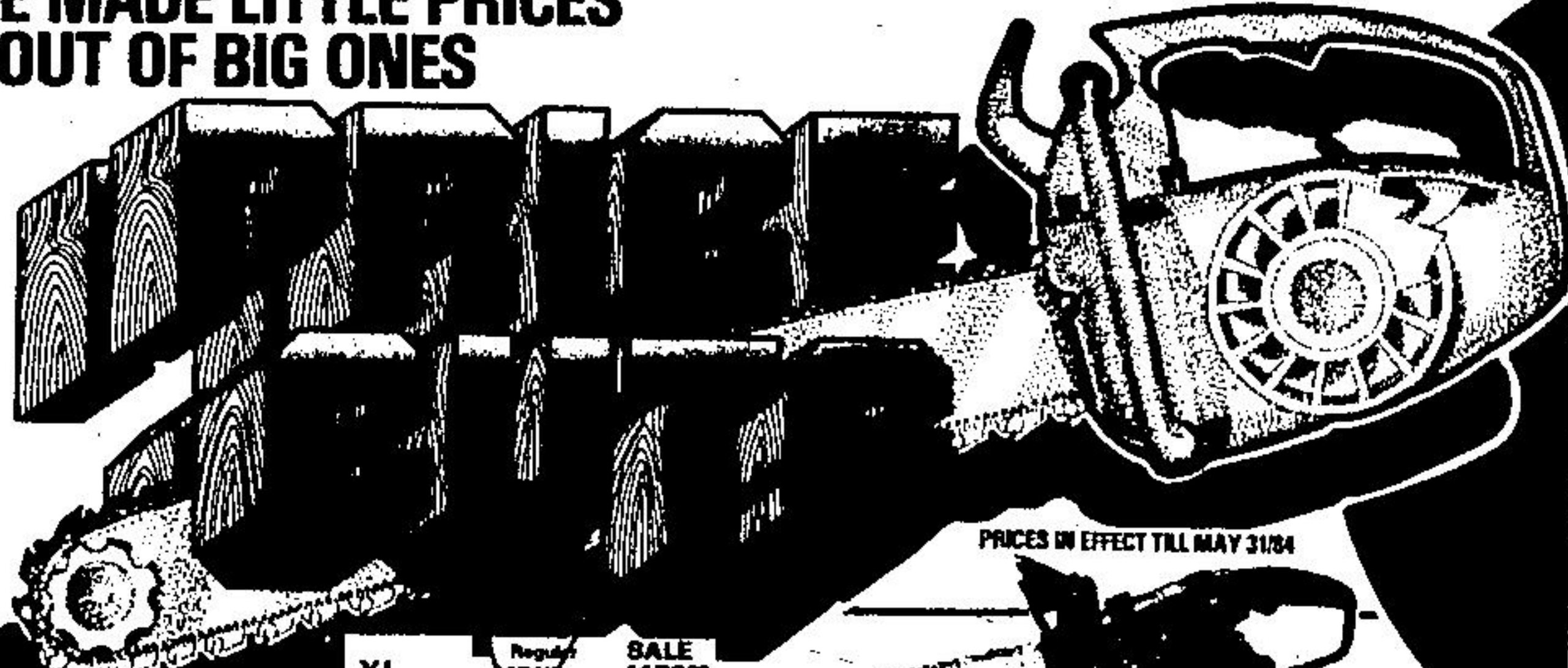
If a deciduous hedge plant is used, prune back to a uniform height of 30 cm (12 in.) to 40 cm (16 in.) immediately after planting. This encourages the plants to thicken out at the base and reduces the amount of foliage so that the root system has a better chance of developing.

Evergreens should not be pruned back as much as deciduous plants; simply shorten the tops to provide a more uniform height, he says.

After planting, tender loving care is all that is required. Keep the plants free of weeds and water well during periods of hot dry weather in the first growing season.

In most cases, little pruning will be required the first year. Shaping can begin in the second year.

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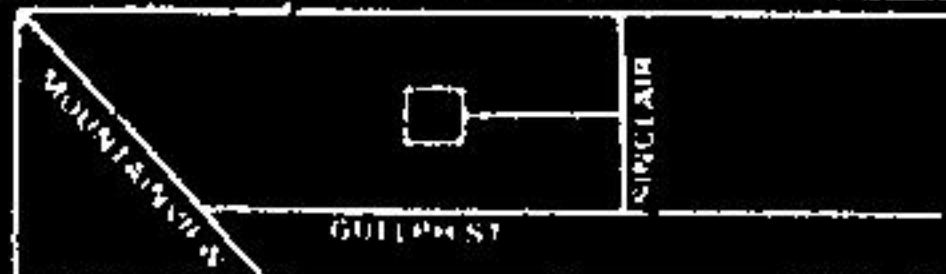
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Put down roots-plant a tree

Put down some roots this year—plant a tree.

Spring and fall are still the most satisfactory times to plant a tree, says Extension Horticulturist Burke McNeill of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food's soils and crops branch, Milton, Ont.

"Today, trees are sold with their roots bound in burlap so they can be planted throughout the growing season. But planting in mid-summer requires special care and often the results are not quite as satisfactory as planting during the dormant spring and fall period."

Choosing the proper site for your tree is important. Be sure the site is compatible with the species of tree to be planted.

For example, white birch trees require moist, cool soil and should be planted on the north or east side of your property.

Avoid planting your tree too close to property line; a species that drops seeds, fruits, or leaves on your neighbor's property could cause hard feelings.

Watch for overhead powerlines too which could obstruct the tree's growth. Prepare your site by digging a hole slightly larger and deeper than the root system on the tree to be planted.

Use new topsoil around the roots to back-fill the hole. Excellent results can also be achieved by mixing some of the existing soil in a 50:50 ratio with peat moss.

Take special care to place soil completely around the roots to avoid air pockets from forming and impeding root development.

Soak the area well after planting to help settle the soil around the roots and eliminate air pockets.

After planting, it is wise to stake your tree, particularly if it is more than 175 centimetres (six feet) high. If your tree is not secured, the wind will rock the tree back and forth, breaking off the new roots as they attempt to attach themselves to the surrounding soil.

Once these steps have been taken, tender loving care is all that is needed. Water your tree well once a week, keep weeds and grass away from the base (at least for the first year) and remove any dead or broken branches.

Check the ties used for staking and loosen these off as the tree grows. Otherwise, the ties, if not expansible, can girdle the tree and cause it to break off.

If a tree does not survive transplanting, it is usually because the roots have not regenerated. Hence the need for all the help you can provide when transplanting.