



## “Prune like a Pro!” 2021

### Boxwood (*Buxus*)

**TITLE: Boxwood (*Buxus*)**

**Description:** Humans have been using boxwoods for about 6,000 years. The name boxwood is derived from the ancient Greeks. While there are about 90 species of boxwood from Eurasia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Central America, only three boxwood species: Littleleaf Boxwood (*Buxus microphylla*), Common Box (*Buxus sempervirens*), and Korean Boxwood (*Buxus sinica* ‘insularis’) -- and hybrids of these species -- are used in the nursery and landscape trades.

**Objective(s):** If you are growing Boxwood as a hedge, it is important to learn to thin the plant(s) first for airflow and sunshine. Boxwoods are one of the few shrubs that you can shear and have beneficial results.

**WHAT:** Boxwoods are often used in formal gardens. In this situation, pruning is done frequently and throughout much of the year – stopping about Labor Day so that new cuts have time to harden before the first frost/freeze.

**WHY:** Some boxwood cultivars have a dense outer layer of foliage (foliage is closely set), while others have a less-dense canopy (spaces between leaves and stems). Pruning Boxwood is done mostly for airflow and sunshine, to reduce the incidence of disease. Second, it is pruned for shape. Pruning for size is a tertiary reason, and is only needed if a too-large variety was planted.

**WHEN:** Boxwoods can be pruned throughout much of the year, except in the fall. Pruning triggers new growth, and new growth from fall pruning will likely suffer cold damage and cause the leaves to turn gray.

**WHERE:** Boxwoods are often used in formal gardens. Larger varieties of Boxwood can be grown as a privacy screen.

**HOW:** First, decide if you want a formal or informal style.

- Start by removing the 4 D’s (dead, diseased, damaged, dysfunctional) from the interior
- Remove the 4 D’s from anywhere else on the shrub
- Identify “hairy” growth and make a thinning cut further down the stem
  - (don’t just give it a “haircut”)
- Use loppers for cuts that are larger than ½” diameter
- Shape the outside of the shrub last. This is where you can use shears (if you choose)
- Make sure the bottom is wider than the top

## SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Keep your Boxwoods healthy by regularly checking for, and removing, the 4D's
- Make sure your tools are sharp. Sharp tools make cleaner cuts.
- Sanitize your tools when moving from one Boxwood to the next, especially if you have removed any diseased material
- Make thinning cuts first, with an eye towards improving airflow and sunshine
- Shape the outside of the Boxwood last.
- Do not remove more than 1/3 of the shrub.
- Be sure to keep the bottom wider than the top.



## Additional Resources / References:

*Pruning Shrubs and Hedges*, University of Maryland Extension,

<https://extension.umd.edu/hgic/topics/pruning-shrubs-and-hedges>

*Selecting Landscape Plants: Boxwoods*, Virginia Tech & Virginia State University,

[https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/426/426-603/HORT-290.pdf](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/426/426-603/HORT-290.pdf)

*Boxwoods*, University of Illinois Extension,

<https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/garden-scoop/2019-05-22-boxwoods>

*When to prune boxwood* - Ask an Expert / eXtension, <https://ask.extension.org/questions/388717>

Knox County Master Gardeners website: [www.knoxcountymastergardener.org](http://www.knoxcountymastergardener.org)

Knox County Master Gardeners Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCountyMG>

Ask-a-Master Gardener / Knox County Extension Helpline: (865) 215-2340

-----  
*Programs in agriculture and natural resources, 4-H youth development, family and consumer sciences, and resource development.  
University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture and county governments cooperating.  
UT Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.*