

Boxwood Care & Pruning

Boxwoods grow in a wide variety of soil types except those that are compacted or poorly drained. They prefer soil on the alkaline side, so you may have to add dolomitic lime. Boxwoods can be grown in full sun or partial shade, and are quite drought-tolerant. Allow the soil to dry completely between watering and don't get the foliage wet. Because boxwoods have shallow roots, they benefit from a layer of organic mulch. It should be applied 1 to 2 inches thick and kept at least 6 inches away from the trunk.

FERTILIZING: Boxwoods should be fertilized with a fertilizer high in nitrogen, in early spring before new growth starts. In areas where needed, the second application should be made in late June or early July. Avoid applying any fertilizer to boxwoods in late summer since it can force late, tender growth that is extremely susceptible to frost damage. The recommended amount of fertilizer should always be distributed uniformly over the planting area. Take care to keep fertilizers off the plant leaves and never spread fertilizers closer than 6 inches to the plant stem. After fertilizing, plant foliage should be washed down with water, and the soil should be thoroughly irrigated.

PRUNING: When you shear or prune boxwoods, most of the new foliage grows at the ends of the branches and shades the inside of the plant. For the optimum health of your boxwood, you should trim the inside branches to provide maximum air circulation and to prevent development of disease. The best time to thin boxwood is in early winter. Use the branches for holiday decorating.

Carefully bend the branches back and you will see that the foliage is growing on the ends of the branches. Use a sharp bypass pruner, reach inside the shrub, and prune a stem about 6 inches long. Continue thinning until you have removed about 10% of the outer branches.

After thinning, you will see small openings in the shape of the plant that will permit air to enter the inner part of the shrub. Continue thinning annually, and after 2 or 3 years, you will see new growth start to appear in the interior portions of the shrub. This results in a healthy plant with strong stems and a greatly reduced susceptibility to disease.

