

HILDEBRANT NURSERIES

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QUALITY NURSERY SUPPLIES AND PRODUCTS SINCE 1923

BOXWOOD CULTURE

By Charles A. Hildebrant

Boxwoods are a large, diverse, group of plants that form a very valuable part of modern landscaping. Although containing the extremes of from absolute dwarfs, up to gigantic landscape specimens, as a group they share amazingly similar needs and tolerances. These critical requirements and cultural controls are discussed below:

- **ROOTS AND PLANTING HEIGHT:** Boxwood are surface rooted plants. They will die if they are planted too deeply. They require a highly aerated soil condition at the top of the root ball crown. In good, well drained, soil, the root ball should be installed so that root crown is one to two inches above the surrounding ground elevation, with organic topsoil mounding up to it. In soil that is heavy and that does not percolate water away rapidly, this should be increased to three to four inches above the surrounding ground, then mound up to it.
- **SOIL:** One of the most critical requirements for boxwood is the use of highly organic, well drained, Horticultural Grade topsoil to plant boxwood. Boxwood cannot tolerate a heavy, low organic, poorly drained soil. **Boxwood are NOT acid loving plants!!** It is critical that only Commercial Bulk Pine Bark Mulch be used around boxwood, in order to maintain a pH between 6.8 and 7.0. All other mulches will cause the soil to become acid and become toxic to boxwood. You can actually kill boxwood by using the wrong kind of mulch!
- **DRAINAGE:** More boxwood die from being too wet than all other reasons combined. Boxwood are amazingly forgiving, EXCEPT, when they are planted in such a way that the roots remain wet. Never plant a boxwood too low, or in poorly drained soil. They must be high and dry, with well drained Horticultural topsoil used around them. **If your boxwood ever turns yellowish, even in the slightest amount, its is crying out in agony that it is drowning.**
- **SUN & SHADE:** Most boxwood are able to tolerate conditions extending from a fair amount of sun down to full shade. Boxwood generally grow better with a bit of shade.
- **EXPOSURE & WINTER PROTECTION:** Newly planted boxwoods, and more sensitive boxwood varieties, should be sprayed with an antidessicant, each early November, to protect them from winter conditions. Strong boxwoods, such as Northern Emerald, and Sempervirens, can withstand some exposed locations. Many other varieties should be considered with caution, as they do not.
- **WATERING:** Always run boxwood slightly on the dry side. Never, NEVER, **NEVER**, use an automatic irrigation system on boxwood plantings. As discussed in the drainage section above, boxwood cannot live in soil that is wet all the time. During an extended dry time, water your established boxwood using a movable sprinkler, or soaker hose for a number of hours, until you can dig down near the plant and see that the water has soaked thoroughly down to about 12 to 15 inches deep. Then don't water again until the ground is dry again. Newly planted boxwood may require more water, but not much! Remember, water kills boxwood!
- **TRIMMING:** The proper time to trim boxwood is the last two weeks of June. Avoid trimming Boxwood after July first, as the new growth that will be caused by this late trimming will not harden off by winter.
- **MULCHING:** It is very important to mulch boxwood. Because of their surface root systems they are sensitive to the vagaries of summer heat and winter cold. It is very critical that you use ONLY BULK COMMERCIAL PINE BARK, to mulch boxwood. The pine bark never compresses down and smothers the roots, and it has the correct pH (acid level) for the boxwood. A four inch mulch thickness of pine bark mulch will last several years. Do not EVER use any of the following mulches near boxwood: Shredded hardwood mulch, dyed mulches, black mulch, cedar mulch, hemlock mulch, double or triple ground mulches, root mulches, cocoa shell mulch, licorice root mulch, wood chips, or grass clippings. All of these mulches will actually harm boxwood. They have the wrong pH for boxwood, and they cause an anaerobic lens (layer) to form where they contact the underlying soil, which actually destroys boxwood root tissue. Avoid using pine bark mulch that comes in bags. The processing that is done to the pine bark so that it will go in the bags tends to neutralize the very aspects of the bark that makes it good for the boxwood. Use only the Commercial Bulk Pine Bark. We maintain a list of local sources for this material at Hildebrant Nurseries, in Oldwick, call us. As a side note, here, you should never use landscape fabric or plastic under mulches near boxwood.