

Alternatives to Pyramidal Cedars and High Water Use Shrubs

Cedar hedges. One sees them 'everywhere' in the Okanagan and, although they are functional and inexpensive to purchase, they have a stressful existence in the dry Okanagan Valley.

Growing a hedge using pyramidal cedars has a number of benefits including:

- fast-growing
- can be pruned or trimmed
- evergreen
- inexpensive hedging material.

However, there are cultural requirements that create drawbacks to using pyramidal cedars in our region. They require:

- a lot of water, compared to alternative hedging plants (see below)
- annual fertilizing
- full sun exposure.

Other disadvantages to growing cedars in the Okanagan include:

- they are a favourite browsing material for deer
- the climatic stresses result in dead or dying cedars needing replacement.

Alternatives to Cedar Hedges

There are some excellent alternatives to pyramidal cedar hedges. These plants create a lush, full hedge without drawing heavily on our water resource.

HEDGING YEW

- tolerates full sun to shaded areas
- tolerates wide range of well-drained soil types, but prefers sandy loam
- evergreen
- not attractive to deer
- low-water once established
- tolerates heavy pruning
- **Both the arils ('berries') and foliage of yew are toxic and should not be ingested.**

PYRAMIDAL JUNIPERS

- several cultivars are available, including 'Spartan' junipers that look much like hedging cedar
- grows at a moderate rate, except for 'Spartan' which is fast-growing
- tolerates full sun and light shade
- tolerates a wide range of well-drained soil types
- low water requirements once established
- do not require fertilizing
- evergreen
- deer-resistant

Alternatives to Pyramidal Cedars and High Water Use Shrubs

OREGON GRAPE

- native plant, well-adapted to native soils
- tolerates full sun but prefers some light shade
- evergreen (broadleaf)
- fragrant flowers in spring; colourful edible berries in fall
- deer-resistant
- restrict watering once established to discourage suckering and 'ill-mannered' growth (or enclose with a root barrier)
- prickly leaf edges make it a good barrier plant

PRIVET

- deciduous, but holds bluish-black berries through the winter
- very dense foliage, providing a good shelter and nesting site
- tolerates trimming
- low-water once established

There are many shrubs that can replace those that use a lot of water. A selection of low-water deciduous shrubs can make a very attractive hedge as well. Choices include:

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| ▪ Arnold's Red Honeysuckle | ▪ Lilac |
| ▪ Forsythia | ▪ Beauty Bush |
| ▪ Wayfaring Tree | ▪ Barberry |
| ▪ Smokebush (<i>Cotinus coggygria</i>) | ▪ Saskatoon |
| ▪ Mock Orange | ▪ Rosa rubrifolia (needs root barrier) |

Tall ornamental grasses can also be used as a hedge. Although they are cut back in the spring, they grow quickly and can screen through the winter.

Be creative: a mix of deciduous and evergreen shrubs, at varying mature heights and differing bloom times and foliage colours can create an outstanding hedge or screen.

Check the plant database at www.okanaganxeriscape.org for more options.