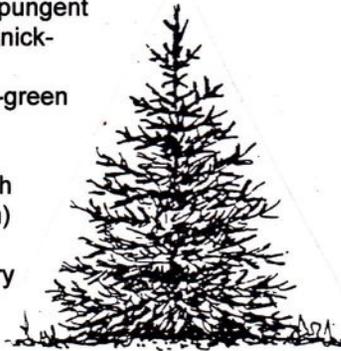


# Planting a white spruce hedge

Hedges provide privacy, protection from wind, and reduced erosion. On Prince Edward Island, white spruce is often planted and pruned for a hedge near a house. Without pruning, white spruce becomes a tall tree, but with annual pruning the height and diameter can be controlled. The growth will eventually be thick and lush, but to look their best the trees need to be planted properly and pruned annually.

## How to identify white spruce

- crushed needles have a strong, pungent odour, earning this species the nickname "cat spruce"
- needles are bright green or blue-green
- needles are stiff and sharp
- twigs are mostly hairless
- twigs are orange-brown to whitish
- cones are 1.5-2 in. (3.75 to 5 cm)
- cones hang from the branches
- bark is scaly, ash-brown to silvery
- mature trees have widely-spreading branches



## Developing a white spruce hedge

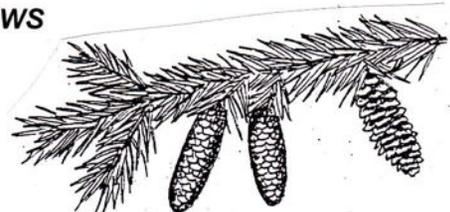
1. Acquire healthy stock with a dense root mass and preferably from 1 - 2 feet (30 - 60 cm) in height.
2. If possible, plant before the long weekend in May.
3. Choose a site with full sun. If shaded, white spruce will drop its lower branches.

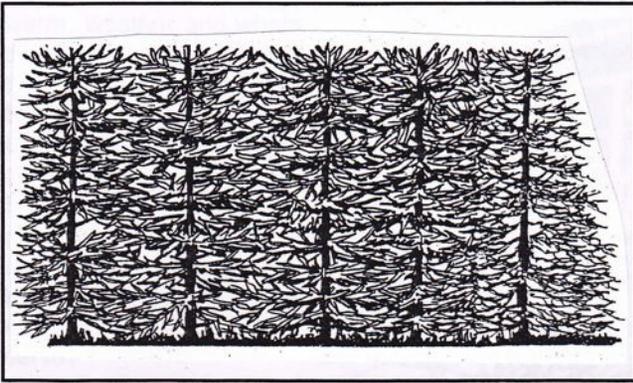
4. The best soil is dry, rich loam. White spruce does not tolerate wet ground.
5. If your ultimate hedge height is 6 feet (1.8 m) or more, plant the trees 2 to 2 1/2 feet (60 - 75 cm) apart. Remember, the hedge needs to be pruned annually and a tall hedge is harder to prune. If your ultimate height is less than 6 feet (1.8 m) plant the trees closer together, approximately 1 1/2 feet (45 cm).
6. Do not plant a double row of trees. The hedge will be very wide and hard to prune properly.
7. Water trees well right after planting. Mulch with wood chips to reduce moisture loss and control competition.
8. During the growing season, water if the weather is hot and dry for long periods.
9. Shear each tree annually, when the new growth appears (usually by late June). The new "flushed" growth will be light green and floppy. **Do not cut the leaders until the desired height is reached.**
  - shear the sides after the new growth appears but before the end of the growing period. More new growth will appear after the shearing, which will give the hedge a softer look.
  - while the young trees are growing to the desired height and width, shear just the tips of the new growth, not all of it.
  - when the desired height and width is reached, shear most of the new growth to limit the tree's size.
10. Shape the hedge as it grows.
  - a square, or top heavy shape will shade the bottom branches which will kill them. The hedge will then have an open, scraggly, unattractive bottom which will not grow back.
  - prune to have a wider bottom than top, such as a pyramid shape. Light will be able to reach the lower branches, keeping them alive and green.
  - the more work you put in, the better it will look.

## Why choose white spruce for hedgerows?

*Many of the tree's characteristics make it an excellent hedge choice:*

- lower branches are retained as the tree grows
- hardy to most weather conditions
- likes to grow in full sun
- responds well to pruning
- tolerant of wind and some salt spray (roadside or seaside)





**Other native species can be pruned to be hedges, including deciduous hardwood trees.** A hardwood hedge is unusual but in the right place it can be lovely and useful. Birds will use it for cover in the summer and a food source in the winter. Some suggestions:

- **hawthorn** will grow into a tight tangle of branches and thorns, and provide excellent cover for small birds. If left with a natural, "soft" finish, the plants will flower in the spring and produce haws to supply food for the birds. Prune every other year to maintain the shape.

- **hemlock** is one of the best choices for a sheared hedge. It is not wind tolerant but does well in partial shade or sunny locations if protected from the wind.

Mulch trees well with wood chips to keep the ground moist and cool. Prune hemlock lightly but often during the first few growing seasons (two to three times from late June to late August for two to three years). After three years prune once, in late June, as with white spruce. Do not cut the leader until the desired height is reached. Hemlock has lovely long, graceful shoots; to enjoy a different look, prune every other year. The hedge will be soft one year, and smooth the next.

- **eastern white cedar** makes a lovely hedge if the right site is chosen. Cedar will not tolerate salt spray, so do not plant near the road or where salt spray may reach it from the shore. Cedar is also intolerant of wind. Both wind and salt may cause the leaves to turn brown. Winter drying, or desiccation, might be prevented by watering thoroughly in late fall and mulching heavily. Cedar does best in a protected site with adequate moisture. If the trees are stressed (from wind, salt, hot dry weather) they are susceptible to cedar leaf miner and mites, which may turn the trees brown. Although a bit worrisome to grow, their fragrant flat, scale-like needles, pleasing shape and light green colour make them worth the work.

Thanks to Tammy Poole, at Ard Gowan National Historic Site in Charlottetown, for sharing her hints.