

Illiana Garden Pond Society

POND PAGES

AUGUST 2011

**AUGUST MEETING • WEDNESDAY,
AUGUST 10, 2011 • 7:00 PM**



Don't miss
our September
meeting!
Member Kathy
Bartley will be
having a Q&A
and training
session all about
better using your
computer to send
in pictures, view
the website and
much more!



Illiana Garden Pond
Society
P.O. Box 448
St. John, Indiana 46373

Illianagardenpond.org

Directions:

From the intersection of SR-231 and SR-55(Indiana Ave. - nine mile road) turn South onto SR-55, go 1.1 miles south to Alice St. turn right (west). Alice is only 2 blocks long. address: 611 is on the left.

Pond Walk

This year's Pond Walk was nice even though we had a lower than average count in ticket sales. Only 157 compared to 260 the previous walk. The weather held out for us and was nice even though quite warm. I am sure both the threat of high temps and the general economic times were both factors.

Many wonderful comments were expressed regarding the homes on the tour. We want to thank all who worked to sell tickets and the families who gave of their time to show their homes and all those behind the scenes who brought it all together. Thanks again to Amber List who organized the walk and all her time spent making it happen.

Bus Trip

Even though the formal bus trip was cancelled, a number of members got together to take the trip themselves. Come to the August meeting to hear about their journey and find out what we missed.

2011 EVENT SCHEDULE

August 2011

August 10, 2011
Wednesday, 7:00 pm
Remaley Home
611 Alice Street
Crown Point, Indiana

September 2011

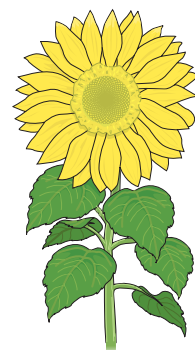
September 10, 2011
Saturday, 10:00 am
Bartley/List Home
Hobart, Indiana

October 2011

October 8, 2011
Saturday, 10:00 am
St. John Library
St. John, Indiana

November 2011 **ELECTIONS**

November 12, 2011
Saturday, 10:00 am
St. John Library
St. John, Indiana



August Tips: The Midwest

Annuals and tropicals are at their peak, and produce from the vegetable garden is rolling in. All you need to do this month is ongoing maintenance.

Watering -- Watering chores are what will eat up your garden time this month. As always, water deeply and occasionally rather than shallow and often.

- If mature plants are flopping, tie them up or use plant supports or stakes (criss-crossed like an X with ends inserted in the soil) to keep them upright and to prevent them from smothering neighboring plants.
- If an annual flower or vegetable is struggling, at this point, just pull it up and pitch it.
- If a perennial is sickly or looking otherwise awful, cut it back to just a few inches. It will come back this year or next spring with healthier growth.
- If your lawn is turning brown, it's probably because it's gone dormant. You have two choices: Allow it to continue in its dormancy by not watering, or bring it out of dormancy with good, regular waterings. The one thing you won't want to do is to bring it out of dormancy repeatedly -- a very stressful situation for turf grass. If you're going to water, keep up with the watering.
- Continue to mow regularly, your best defense against weeds. If you haven't already, make sure you're mowing grass high -- not making it too short and "scalping" it, which damages the grass and opens up areas for weeds to germinate. Bluegrasses, for example, should be cut at 3 inches during hot weather.
- Avoid pruning evergreens when it's so hot. And pruning them in the fall will encourage fresh new growth that may get nipped by winter's cold. It's best at this point to wait until next spring.

Mulch Matters -- You may need to replenish mulches, especially those that break down quickly, such as straw or grass clippings. Mulches should be 1-3 inches.

Whack Your Weeds -- Time weeding for after a good rain. Weeds come out easier and with more of the root.

Deadheading 101 -- Keep deadheading! For the most flowers and tidiest garden, deadhead daily.

Keep an eye out for aphids and spider mites. Treat with insecticidal soap. Spider mites, which also thrive in dry weather, can be treated with pyrethrums, an extract from mums.

All About Garden Mulches

Why Mulch?

Mulch's purpose is pretty basic: It acts as a barrier, keeping sunlight and some air away from the soil surface. Sounds simple enough, but mulch's smothering effect brings with it both good news and bad. Consider these positive and negative effects of tucking in your soil beneath a blanket of mulch:

Without the summer sun's rays striking it, soil stays cooler and plant roots don't stress from the heat. The bad news is that slugs, earwigs, cutworms, and other eat-and-run types love cool, moist, dark places. To minimize bugs, use only a thin layer of mulch, keeping it several inches away from plant bases.

About Mulch continued

Water in the soil doesn't thaw on sunny winter days, then refreeze at night. That's good news. The melting-and-freezing cycle makes water shrink and expand, possibly popping shallow-rooted plants right out of the ground -- a phenomenon called heaving. Heaving spells the end for plants.

The ground warms more slowly in the spring. This is good because perennials aren't fooled into breaking dormancy too early. You want the ground to stay cold until it really is spring. The drawback is that perennials may bloom late or soil may not be ready for spring planting. If so, rake back mulch until the soil warms up. Or, if you don't mulch over winter, wait until plants green up before mulching.

Water evaporates more slowly from cool soil protected from the wind. If you mulch, you don't have to water as much, saving time, money, and a precious resource. However, heavy rains can make the ground soggy and puddly for days. If beds become bogs, rake off mulch and let soil dry.

Without sunlight, some seeds can't germinate, and sprouts may not have the oomph to push through the mulch. This prevents weeds, but it thwarts some good seeds, too. Mulch after seedlings are up and have some girth and vigor.

Raindrops don't hit the soil surface, so soil is less likely to wash away or splash onto plants. This keeps plants cleaner and free of some soil-dwelling diseases.

Trimming a Hedge

For straight sides and a flat top, use stakes and string as a guide

by John Sosnowski

I am the only one who prunes the boxwood (*Buxus microphylla* 'Koreana') hedge at the Morton Arboretum, in Lisle, Illinois. The hedge is the only formal garden at the arboretum, and I enjoy the rigid, neat, and precise trimming it requires. Maybe it's my background in art that allows me to appreciate its design purity. Or maybe it's that my shearing system seems to work right every time.

You certainly don't need a degree in art to want a nice, smooth hedge, and this system, which I've used in my nine years of pruning the boxwoods, is one anyone can use to achieve the same clean, formal look our hedges have.

The straight edge that is the hallmark of the formal hedge depends most on what you do before you cut. Accurate measurements and well-placed stakes are the key. I recommend shearing the hedge in an inverted keystone shape, narrower on the top and wider at the bottom. At the arboretum, we shear our boxwood hedge to 24 inches wide across the top and 36 inches wide at the bottom. This slight 6-inch slope is both attractive and healthy, as it allows all branches to get maximum sunlight. The shade that's created beneath it is an added benefit, because it cuts down on weeding and watering.





The first step to trimming is getting the template in place. Starting at one end of the hedge, I measure the desired width of the top. Since the outer new leaves tend to grow more vigorously on the southern or sunlit side, I note the location of the shrub's main trunks before finalizing this measurement, to keep the hedge centered. When I'm sure of the measurement, I mark it with stakes, which are easy to see and to move if adjustment becomes necessary. Metal stakes are preferable, but beware: Most metal stakes fit into a hedge trimmer's teeth, so work carefully around them to avoid tool damage. Wood, stiff bamboo, or plastic will also work.

I use the inner stakes as guides for placing the outer stakes. I first divide the difference between the top and bottom widths in half. This amount is how far the stake marking the bottom should be from the stake marking the top.

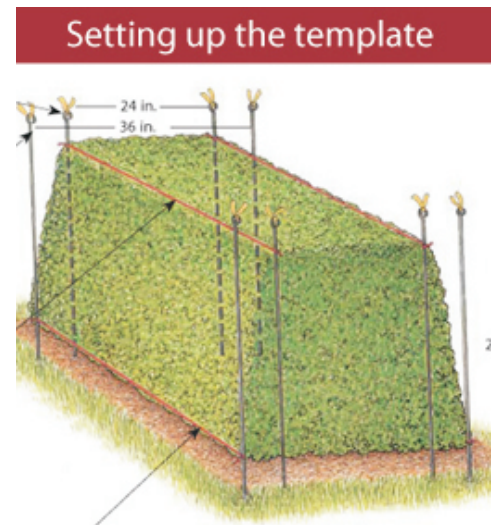
For instance, our hedges measure 24 inches across the top and 36 inches at the bottom, which is a difference of 12 inches. So the stakes marking the top and bottom widths of the hedge should be 6 inches apart.

I use the same method to measure and stake the opposite end of the hedge. With my eight stakes in place, I stretch the twine and tie it to the two sets of inner stakes at 24 inches high, the intended height of the hedge. I then tie twine between the two external sets of stakes right above ground level to mark the outer sides of the keystone. I drive the stakes deep into the ground, as the twine needs to be stretched taut to be perfectly straight. More stakes inserted in the middle makes it easier to keep the string stable and the cut even. I use a 3-inch line level strung on the twine to ensure that my cuts stay even.

When it's time to start trimming, I don't try to do it all in one bite. I shave off a layer of side foliage, using the top twine line and the bottom twine line as a guide. It may make two or three passes to create a smooth surface. I use a light touch when hearing foliage because a year's growth may only be 3 or 4 inches, giving a total of only 6 inches to work with before bare wood is exposed. But if a cut is made too deep, take heart: Dormant buds will replace the green in a year or two.

To cut a flat top, I use the lines formed by the twine strung between the stakes along the top of the hedge. I never measure from the ground up, since the ground can be uneven. Once I have my guide in place, I just hold the tool firmly, lock my arms at the desired height, and go for a walk. If the hedge top is flat and dense, I rest the tool on top and glide the cut along. I take a break before the tool gets heavy to avoid a cut that droops. I also watch out for dips in the ground, which can cause dips in my cut. Before putting the finishing touches on the top cut, I evaluate my work from a distance, viewing it from where most see it: a walkway, the street, the entrance, or a window. Then I finish the top cut, keeping these points of reference in mind.

The last thing I do is finish the edges. The hard, sharp edges have less leaf material and, in my opinion, tend to look sparse and ragged. A 45-degree bevel cut rounds this shaggy corner, finishing the hedge with



a tighter yet softer appearance. The beveled edge also reduces winter damage by allowing the hedge to shed ice and snow.

High spots in the hedge can be easily trimmed off, but a gouge can be difficult to fix. To repair a gouge, the whole hedge length can be cut deeper to match the lowest area, or the branch arrangement can be reweven to fluff up and fill the gouged area. But the best practice is to err on the side of leaving too much on rather than taking too much off.

Only one accurately measured cut is required per year--in late summer, when new growth is complete.

Good shrubs for formal hedges

The following shrubs can be pruned using the same method described for the boxwood. Hardiness zones are indicated.

- Alpine currant (*Ribes alpinum*), Z 2–6
- Amur maple (*Acer ginnala*), Z 3–7
- Dwarf lace shrub (*Stephanandra incisa*), Z 5–6
- Hedge cotoneaster (*Cotoneaster lucidus*), Z 3–7
- Hedge maple (*Acer campestre*), Z 5–8
- Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), Z 5–8
- 'Little King' river birch (*Betula nigra* 'Little King'), Z 4–9
- Ninebarks (*Physocarpus* spp.), Z 3–7
- Winged euonymus (*Euonymus alatus*), Z 4–9
- Yews (*Taxus* spp. and cvs.), Z 5–7

Time your pruning to match the shrub's needs

It would be great if you had to prune a hedge only once a year, but to maintain a clean look, the best practice is to cut often. Early in the growing season, cuts should be light, just to keep the hedge from looking shaggy. This light shearing can be done monthly, beginning in May or June, which is after the burst of vigorous spring growth. Only one accurately measured cut is required per year—in late summer, when new growth is complete. Cutting more often is necessary only if a tighter appearance is desired. Never prune boxwoods in winter, because it can cause freeze-back of foliage and additional stem loss at the cut stubs.

Certain other evergreen hedges can be pruned following these guidelines (see the list). Still others have their own particular pruning needs. For instance, eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) must have its candles cut in half in spring to remain a tight, multibranched bush. Arborvitae (*Thuja* spp.) needs its flattened branchlets removed to reduce its size. If just parts of the compressed fanlike foliage are sheared it will leave them looking unnatural and deformed. Be sure you know your hedge's pruning needs before you start to cut.

Illustration: Dolores C. Santoliquido; All photos: Steve Aitken

From *Fine Gardening* 87, pp. 57-59