

Little at Large



Garden talk, by Simply Garden's Martin Little

ALTHOUGH it's a job which often gets overlooked or put off, cutting a hedge is an essential part of summer maintenance.

It is also immensely satisfying to see a shaggy outline transformed into a uniform shape that sets off the entire garden.

The secret of the perfect hedge is simple and here are a few tips to obtain it.

Many people imagine the

ultimate hedge shape to have perfectly straight, vertical sides and a precise horizontal top.

In fact a gradual slope, so that the hedge is wider at its base, is better as it allows light to fall more evenly on its surface.

Never have a wider top, as this will shade the lower branches eventually causing a bare base.

A top-heavy shape will also be much more prone to damage from snow, which may break the branches in the winter.

A good eye is often all that's needed to produce an even cut.

So stand back often, to check the shape. I must admit, though, that this comes with experience.

A simple guide can be made from bamboo canes and string, and this is especially useful for getting a straight top.

A mature hedge can be kept in check by simply cutting off all new growth made during the summer.

When establishing a hedge, it's also important to prune from the start.

This may seem a waste of growth when looking for a quick hedge.

But it pays dividends in the end as early pruning will encourage bushy growth which will furnish the hedge with branches to the ground.

Always use the correct equipment for a safe and effective job and choose tools that are comfortable for you to manage.

You may think, for example, that a longer blade will get the work done quicker, but it may not be an advantage if it makes the tool heavy and cumbersome.

**Happy gardening
Martin Little**