

SMARTGARDEN™ — Maintaining an Edge

Edges define garden spaces and also helps control the spread of plant growth

Whether your landscape is large or small, it consists of different areas such as walkways, paths, beds, lawn, driveway, patio, etc. Defining these areas and maintaining their integrity helps keep your landscape looking neat and well tended. Both objectives can be accomplished with an effective edging.

UTILITY AND VISUAL APPEAL

Edgings are both practical and aesthetic. By preventing grass from encroaching into areas where it's not desired, weeding is reduced. Along frequently traveled routes, steep inclines, and after heavy rains, loose pathway materials like gravel, shredded bark, or pine needles tend to stray into beds or lawn if not confined by an edging. The outer edge of a paved walkway—particularly one set in sand—is protected and given integrity by a solidly constructed edging.

Beyond utility, attractive edgings highlight the spaces they enclose, and by framing individual beds and paths, they contribute definition and style to the overall landscape. Edgings can help unify a design, by echoing colors, lines, or materials used elsewhere. They are also helpful for distinguishing areas intended for foot traffic from those that are not—unfortunately children and pets don't always pick up on this distinction!

Edgings can be subtle or bold, depending on the style and material you choose. Installation can involve considerable cost and effort, or can be accomplished simply and inexpensively using a sharp edging tool. The style you select has a significant impact on the level of maintenance. Some edgings require occasional primping; others, once installed, rarely need further attention. Some edgings, though attractive, require frequent hand trimming of the adjacent lawn, actually increasing maintenance chores—these types should be avoided. A “smart” edging should harmonize with the rest of your landscape, suit your budget, and help reduce landscape maintenance.

There are two basic types of edging. The first is an installed barrier that prevents the mingling of material in adjacent areas, with numerous options for style and ma-

terial. The second is a simple cut edge that requires no installation of hardscaping material; rather a narrow trench is cut along the periphery of a bed, surgically ensuring separation of lawn and garden.

BUILDING A BARRIER

Barrier edges can be made of a variety of constructed and natural materials like rock, concrete, brick, timber, and plastic. Selecting material that is used in other areas of the yard, such as the brick of the house, the railroad ties of a retaining wall, or the flagstone of a path, can promote a sense of continuity with the overall landscape.

To install a barrier edging, excavate a channel just slightly wider than the width of the edging material to

a depth of two inches deeper than you plan to set the edging. Spread about two inches of stone dust in the bottom of the channel to prevent settling and set the edging material as desired. Fill in with stone dust or soil to hold the edging firmly.

Barrier edgings can either be raised or set in the ground so that the upper surface is approximately level with the soil. This distinction is important, and the best style for any particular edging depends on its intended use.

To separate a path or walkway from a mulched bed, a raised edge effectively prevents erosion and contains the mulch. If the walkway is constructed of flagstone, pavers, or brick set in sand, the raised edging also provides support to its perimeter.

Raised edgings often contribute attractive detail to the landscape, and, because they are visible, both material and style are important considerations. For a formal look, bricks can be set diagonally in a dog-tooth pattern, vertically for a taller edge, or end to end horizontally for a smooth, low border. A wider, more prominent edging can be constructed using two or more rows of bricks, in a variety of patterns.

For a more informal look, short round logs or bamboo sections can be set on end at equal or varying heights. Landscaping timbers or railroad ties are effective for straight edges on level ground, while stone more easily accommodates grade changes and curves. Other mate-



This informal brick edging separates lawn from border and is low enough to serve as a mowing strip.

rial options include pre-cast concrete blocks or pavers, forms manufactured from recycled plastic, bender boards, or cedar shakes.

For segregating a sweep of lawn from another area on the same grade, opt for an edging that is flush with, or only slightly raised from the soil level. The critical height is one that is below the cutting blade of your mower. This type of edging, often referred to as a mowing strip, is usually constructed of railroad ties, flagstone, brick, or a band of concrete. A bit of excavation and precision is required for installation, but once in place, maintenance is a snap. By riding one wheel of the mower along the edging surface, you can have a neatly mowed lawn that requires no additional trimming.

A raised edging, on the other hand, requires frequent hand trimming of adjacent turf, either with a pair of grass shears or a string trimmer, to maintain a neat appearance. Remember that an effective edging should reduce maintenance, not add to it.

Plastic and steel edging strips are relatively inexpensive, but are not visual assets, so they should be installed so only the top of the barrier is exposed. Plastic edging is also available in short, vertical sections that are hammered into place with a rubber mallet. These edgings easily conform to the curves of your bed or walk. Frost may cause them to heave up out of the soil, how-

ever, and may cause plastic edgings to crack over time. And given the minimal separation that these strips provide, ground covers and grass often spread over them, defeating their purpose.

THE CUTTING EDGE

You can create an edge for a garden without installing any hardscaping material simply by cutting a shallow trench around the periphery of the bed. The result is an elegant edge that suits any landscaping style. Although less expensive than a barrier, it does need to be renewed regularly.

To construct the edge, use lime or a garden hose to outline the area and an edger or a flat blade spade for digging the trench. By ensuring the blade of your cutting tool is sharp, you will expend less effort and have a crisper edge. Following the outline, dig a three- or four-inch trench, keeping the lawn side of the trench vertical, and angling the inside edge of the trench toward the bed. Shake clumps of turf or weeds to get loose soil off, then put them in your compost pile. Extra soil can be raked back into the bed. To keep the edge crisp, re-cut the edge once or twice per growing season.

Rita Pelczar, Associate Editor

An assortment of edging materials and products are profiled in "Seasonal Garden Goods," on the next page.

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