

# Boxwood Guide for BC

## OVERVIEW

Classic evergreen shrubs prized for dense foliage, year-round structure, and their versatility as formal hedges, topiaries, and border edging. Boxwood is a reliable, long-lived garden workhorse across BC's South Coast and in Penticton gardens.

## AT A GLANCE

- Dense, fine-textured evergreen foliage - perfect for formal hedges, topiaries, and low edging
- Tolerates full sun to partial shade; adapts well to BC South Coast conditions
- Ideal for defining garden spaces, edging pathways, and adding year-round structure
- Slow to moderate growth - prune twice yearly (late spring and late summer) for a clean look

## SUNLIGHT & LOCATION: WHERE TO PLANT BOXWOOD

Boxwood performs best in full sun to partial shade. On BC's South Coast, morning sun with afternoon shade is ideal - this protects foliage from intense summer heat while supporting healthy, compact growth. Avoid deep shade, which causes thin, open growth and increases disease susceptibility.

### South Coast Tip

In the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island, boxwood planted in sheltered spots near buildings or walls benefits from warmth and wind protection, producing denser growth. Avoid exposed coastal sites where salt spray and desiccating winds can scorch foliage over winter.

### Growing in Penticton

Penticton's semi-arid climate (Zone 6b) is workable for boxwood but requires extra attention to summer watering and winter protection.

Choose a site with afternoon shade to reduce heat stress. Mulch deeply around the root zone to conserve soil moisture. In exposed areas, protect plants with burlap wrapping or an anti-desiccant spray in late November to prevent winter burn from cold, dry winds.

## SOIL & PLANTING: GETTING BOXWOOD ESTABLISHED

Boxwood prefers well-drained, moderately fertile soil with a slightly alkaline to neutral pH (6.5–7.5). It will not tolerate waterlogged conditions - root rot is the most common cause of boxwood decline. On the South Coast, where heavy clay soils are prevalent, amend the planting hole with compost and coarse grit to improve drainage.

Best planting times: spring (March–May) and fall (September–October). Fall planting allows roots to establish before summer heat, reducing first-season watering needs. Never plant deeper than the nursery container depth.

## WATERING NEEDS

Newly planted boxwood needs regular, consistent watering through its first growing season. Once established (usually after 1–2 seasons), boxwood is relatively drought-tolerant on the South Coast, where autumn and winter rainfall provides adequate moisture.

Water deeply and infrequently. Allow soil to partially dry between waterings. A 5–8 cm mulch layer around the root zone helps retain moisture and regulate temperature.

### Growing in Penticton

In Penticton's dry summers, established boxwood will need supplemental irrigation from June through September. Water once or twice weekly during extended dry periods, delivering 2–4 cm of water per session. Drip irrigation is effective at keeping roots evenly moist without wetting foliage. Reduce watering in October as the plant prepares for dormancy.

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## PRUNING FOR SHAPE AND HEALTH

Prune lightly in late spring (late May–early June) once new growth has hardened off, and again in late summer (August) to tidy the shape before winter. Avoid pruning after mid-September, as this can stimulate tender new growth vulnerable to early frosts.

### Pruning Tip

Always clean and sterilize pruning tools between plants if boxwood blight is a concern in your area. Boxwood blight has been detected in parts of BC, and spread via contaminated tools is a primary transmission route. A 10% bleach solution or 70% isopropyl alcohol wipe between cuts is effective.

## FERTILIZING: FEEDING YOUR BOXWOOD

Apply a slow-release fertilizer (such as GARDENWORKS Tree & Shrub Food 18-4-8) in early spring (March–April on the South Coast).

A second light application in early June supports healthy summer growth. Avoid fertilizing after July - late-season feeding encourages soft growth vulnerable to early frosts. A spring top-dressing of compost is an excellent supplement.

## WINTER CARE: PROTECTING BOXWOOD THROUGH WINTER

Most of BC's South Coast (Zone 7–8) supports established boxwood reliably. However, plants in exposed sites or containers may benefit from root mulch and a loose burlap wrap to reduce winter desiccation. Container-grown boxwood should be moved to a sheltered location during severe cold snaps.

### Growing in Penticton

Penticton winters are colder and drier than the South Coast. Wrap boxwood with burlap in late November - not to retain warmth, but to block desiccating winter sun and wind that cause leaf scorch. Apply a thick 10 cm mulch layer over the root zone before freeze-up. Avoid plastic wrapping, which can trap moisture and promote disease.

## COMMON ISSUES: TROUBLESHOOTING BOXWOOD PROBLEMS

### Boxwood Blight

Circular brown spots on leaves followed by rapid defoliation. Remove infected material immediately and disinfect tools. Choose resistant varieties like 'NewGen' series to reduce risk.

### Root Rot

Wilting, yellowing, and decline caused by Phytophthora in poorly drained soil. Ensure excellent drainage at planting. There is no cure - remove and replace affected plants.

### Winter Burn

Brown, papery foliage in late winter or early spring caused by desiccation. More common in exposed sites and inland areas like Penticton. Prevent with burlap wrapping and anti-desiccant spray.

### Boxwood Psyllid

Cupped, distorted new growth caused by small sap-sucking insects. Rarely fatal. Trim off affected shoots in spring. Beneficial insects usually manage populations naturally.

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Can boxwood grow in a container on a patio in the Lower Mainland?**

Yes — boxwood is an excellent container plant. Choose a container with good drainage holes and a high-quality potting mix, such as MySoil Container Mix and add a slow release fertilizer in with the soil, such as GARDENWORKS Slow Release Plant Food 14-14-14. Container plants need more frequent watering and winter protection, as roots in containers are more exposed to freeze-thaw cycles than in-ground plants.

### **How fast does boxwood grow, and how tall will it get?**

Growth rate depends on variety. Common boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens*) grows 15–30 cm per year under good conditions, eventually reaching 1–5 m unpruned. Dwarf varieties like 'Suffruticosa' grow as little as 5 cm per year. With regular pruning, most gardeners maintain boxwood at 60 cm–1.2 m for hedges and borders.

### **Is boxwood deer resistant?**

Boxwood has a reputation for being generally deer-resistant due to its mildly toxic and unpalatable foliage. However, in areas with high deer pressure - particularly in rural parts of the Fraser Valley and areas surrounding Penticton - hungry deer may browse boxwood during winter. Protective fencing or deer repellent sprays may be warranted in high-pressure areas.

### **What are good disease-resistant alternatives to traditional boxwood?**

Consider Japanese holly (*Ilex crenata*), Inkberry holly (*Ilex glabra*), or Taxus (yew) for similar formal evergreen effects. Ask our nursery staff for the current best-performing varieties for your specific location.

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