TRADECRAFT

Several trees, one green hedge

One straight face, one level top, no gaps between plants.

DRAFT V0.6, PENDING INSTALLER REVIEW

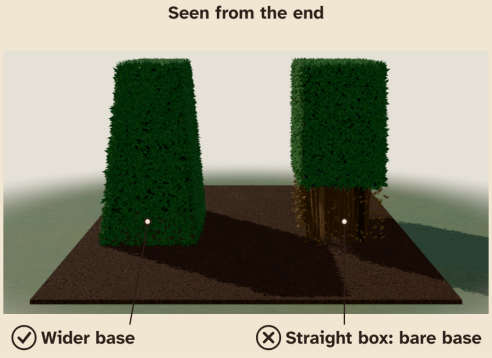
THE STEPS ON VIDEO

3 RULES

1 Every cut stays in the green

2 Wider at the bottom than the top

3 String and level, never by eye



KEY NUMBERS

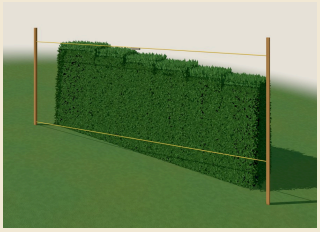
20%	most you cut back an overgrown hedge
3	top ladder steps you never stand on
2–3	years to lower a tall hedge

A cut into the brown leaves a hole that never fills. The customer sees it every day, and the referral is gone.

STOP AND CHECK

Main shaping goes in late winter or early spring.

- Overgrown hedge: cut > 20%, it won't recover
- Much lower: not a trim; 2–3 years, quoted as its own job
- Heat or drought: light work only, and the customer waters deeply
- Late fall or winter: no shearing, drying wind browns the cuts



FINISHED LOOK

Emerald Green arborvitae (Thuja occidentalis 'Smaragd') — 6 pieces

Colour not chosen yet

STEPS

1 Read the row

- Hand in: how deep is the green?
- Lagging plant: cut lighter, flag watering
- Bare brown gap: photo, tell customer first

Check: Each plant: where the green ends

2 Set the line

- Stake each end: string top and bottom
- Small level hung on the string; not from ground
- Long run: middle stakes, no sag

Check: Bubble centered on the top string

3 The faces

- Bottom string wider: base wider than top
- Light passes, bottom to top
- Sharp blades; clean after diseased growth

Check: From the end: one single face

4 Close the gaps

- Soft tips only, on facing sides
- Light trims, several times a season
- No bare stub: cut to green fork

Check: No brown wood showing in the gap

5 Top and corners

- Top flat to string, green growth only
- Corner: light bevel, an angled cut
- Soft growth: light trims into early summer

Check: Top even with the string, no brown

THE 3 COSTLIEST MISTAKES

✕ Cutting into the gap to even it	✕ Straight box: the base goes bare	✕ One deep pass into the brown
✓ Soft tips on the sides; it fills in	✓ Wider base: sun reaches the bottom	✓ Light passes up to the string

This job's local rule: Some cities limit hedge height on a property line or next to a driveway.

Hard-surface limit: _____ Water goes to: _____ Permit? yes / no

STAY SAFE

- Best practice: a tripod ladder set firm in the ground, the single leg uphill on a slope, never on the top three steps.
- Don't overreach: climb down and move the ladder, and never step onto the hedge.
- Glasses, hearing protection and gloves with the trimmer; an outdoor-rated cord on a GFCI, and clear of power lines.

Sources: MU Extension G6870; OSU Extension (arborvitae, 2024); UMaine Extension; UDel Extension; Ask Extension; CSU PlantTalk 1713 and 2130; Fine Gardening (Morton Arboretum, Stevens-Coolidge); OSHA, tripod orchard ladders.

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