



I N T H E G A R D E N

EAST UPROOTS WEST IN BOXWOODS

BY DONNA WILLIAMSON

N E W A S I A N S P E C I E S R E P L A C E F I N I C K Y E N G L I S H P L A N T S

Want an elegant evergreen with charm and grace? Want it to be fluffy, columnar, statuesque or vase-shaped? Need to have it in the sun or in shady areas? Perhaps you need a light green or dark green shrub or one with a bluish cast or even a variegated one. Did I mention deer-proof? Amazingly, our pesky deer don't eat boxwood or its cousins, *Pachysandra* or *Sarcococca*.



BUXUS SEMPERVIRENS 'ROTUNDIFOLIA' HAS LARGE ROUND LEAVES AND GROWS TO 10 FEET OR MORE.



BIG-LEAFED 'WINTERGREENS' BOXWOOD DOES VERY WELL IN VIRGINIA.



BUXUS MICROPHYLLA 'JOHN BALDWIN' GROWS ABOUT 6 INCHES A YEAR AND NEEDS SOME SHADE IN THE WINTER MONTHS.



Photograph by Donna Williamson



THE BOXWOOD MEMORIAL GARDEN DISPLAYS THE LARGEST VARIETY OF BOXWOOD CULTIVARS IN NORTH AMERICA AT THE FARM, PART OF THE STATE ARBORETUM.

Photograph courtesy of Tim Farmer, Blandy Experimental Farm

areas where between-the-homes privacy can be an issue. Avoid 'Graham Blandy,' for although it is attractively narrow, over time—10 years or so—branches splay out badly and require frequent pruning.

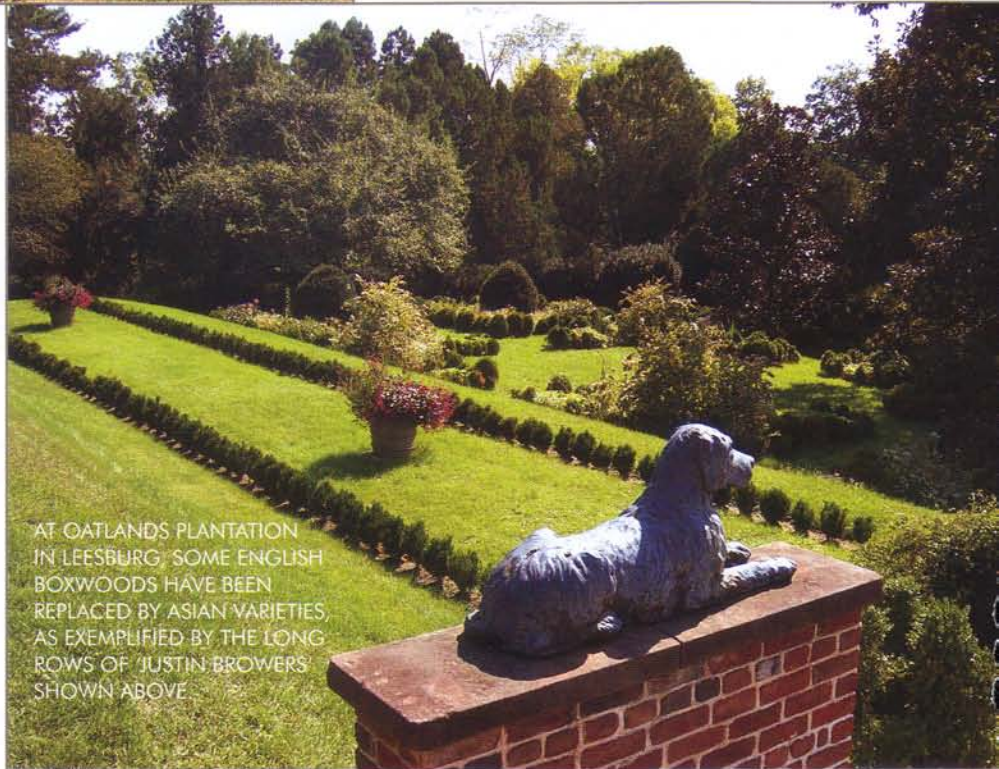
Statuesque, pyramidal forms bring many designs together, providing focal points and places for the eye to rest, so important in the home landscape. *Buxus microphylla* 'John Baldwin' is tall and pyramidal with small, tight yet soft-looking leaves. It needs some shade in the winter months.

Buxus sempervirens 'Rotundifolia' is another favorite for its very dark green and large round leaves. This boxwood seems bulletproof in the garden, taking sun or shade with equanimity. Ten feet tall (or more) with a 9-foot spread, this small tree is a star. For a softer look

Boxwood is not just for Williamsburg anymore. This versatile evergreen is now more reliable and tough. New species and varieties from Korea and China, *Buxus microphylla* and *Buxus sinica*, have given designers fresh choices in evergreens for today's landscapes. They are replacing the persnickety English boxwood (*Buxus sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa') from the White House to Oatlands to the house on the corner. And with the replacement of many sad English boxwood, we find that the pungent, catty/foxy aroma of boxwood largely disappears as well. It seems that the Asian species of boxwood don't smell as bad. I'm not sure that the "fragrance" is gone entirely because the deer still don't eat it, and I think that is mostly because of the smell.

While boxwood used to be separated into English and American, all varieties of *Buxus sempervirens*, we can now choose from dozens of varieties that suit most landscaping needs. Tiny-leaved and very slow-growing dwarf *Buxus microphylla* 'Justin Brouwers' has replaced English box in the low hedges of the White House. Mature plants grace the entry to the garden at Oatlands. The dwarf Korean box, *Buxus sinica*, variety *insularis*, makes a lovely, fluffy 3- by 3-foot mound, perfect for the winter phase of your perennial garden. Not obtrusive during the growing season, this good-looking boxwood gives soft definition and delicious green in winter.

Recently I visited a charming garden in Upperville. Years ago, *Buxus microphylla* 'Green Pillow' boxwood was used to outline and segment an herb garden into several 4- by



AT OATLANDS PLANTATION IN LEESBURG, SOME ENGLISH BOXWOODS HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY ASIAN VARIETIES, AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE LONG ROWS OF 'JUSTIN BROUWERS' SHOWN ABOVE.

4-foot sections. Called *parterre* by the French, the low dense hedges surrounding a planting bed in a geometric form supply year-round sense of order to a design. *Parterres* are good for many home landscapes, adding visual weight to an often-fragmented garden situation.

Not all *Buxus sempervirens* are finicky. Many are great hedge, specimen and foundation plants, tolerating the alkalinity of concrete foundations or walkways better than the more frequently planted and acid-loving rhododendrons. Ten-foot-tall *Buxus sempervirens* 'Dee Runk' and 'Fastigiata' create slender and elegant hedges, especially welcome in narrow

overall, try 'John Baldwin,' which has smaller, mid-green leaves and about the same height and spread. Both grow about 6 inches per year.

Crafty Canadians have developed wonderfully cold-hardy boxwood that should thrive in cooler areas of the mid-Atlantic: 'Green Mountain,' 'Green Gem,' 'Green Beauty' and 'Green Velvet.' Bred in Ontario, they are said to have *Buxus sempervirens* 'Suffruticosa' (or English) and Asian parentage.

Boxwood is also a wonderful ground cover. Last year I bought very small 'Sport of Compacta' boxwood plants from a grower on the Eastern Shore to put under some lindens. This

particular form of boxwood is gently weeping, soft-looking and very slow-growing, a perfect plant to cover the ground.

It's good gardening practice to buy small (and less costly) plants that will unobtrusively knit in with existing tree roots. As the planting holes are small, you ease the plants in rather than forcing them in with a big shovel. This approach requires less muscle power from you and spares root damage to your valuable trees. The little plants grow easily and naturally under the bigger trees. All you have to do is be a little patient. With its mid-green color and slow-growing nature, in three to five years this dwarf will provide a lovely green bed, year round, under the taller trees—exquisite!

Boxwood culture is easy if you avoid English box. While no boxwood like wet feet, once established they are amazingly tolerant of moderate drought. Like every other plant, establishing boxwood within your landscape is crucial. Provide about an inch of water per week after planting. In a year, the boxwood roots will be knitted into the surroundings and you can forgo the weekly watering.

Good winter drainage is also important. Don't let boxwood sit in a cold puddle. Other-

wise, most varieties tolerate sun during part of the day, some all day. I try to protect some of the more sun-shy in the summer by planting them near taller woody plants and robust perennials that will provide some shade during the hottest, longest days. Good companions for shading boxwood include colorful elderberries, tall asters or Korean chrysanthemums, smoke trees, shrub roses, and larger grasses, like *Calamagrostis* 'Karl Forester.'

Most everyone can enjoy this long-lived and



EXAMPLES OF
BOXWOODS, SHOWN
IN FOREGROUND,
ABOUND AT HISTORIC
OATLANDS PLANTATION
IN LEESBURG.

versatile evergreen shrub for its different shades of green, forms to fit almost every landscape design situation, and its tolerance of heavy soils. You can even use winter prunings to decorate for the holidays. And you can stop planting to feed the deer!

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