

Planting Privacy

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>> Published Date: 4/25/2012



Explore the vast range of possibilities that your plants offer, and paint a picture for your customers that suits their screening and hedging needs, solves their problems, and creates an engaging landscape. Steering gardeners away from inappropriate choices toward more successful solutions may mean avoiding the typical string of arborvitae, run of bamboo or clumps of (insert your region's most overplanted shrub here).

When asked, "What can I plant to (solve this problem)?" take a tip from the Master Gardener tradition, and answer a question with a question (or many questions) not just about the privacy needed, but also about the available space and growing conditions. Getting to the heart of the matter and helping a customer find the right solution will endear you to the customer—and the customer's friends and family.

Spot Screening

Although a monoculture hedge may be the easiest choice, spot screens offer homeowners a chance to cover up the one visual nuisance in their landscape without sacrificing the rest of the property. Instead of a 40-ft. row of arborvitae, try a row of three that successfully blocks the view between the patio and the kitchen window next door. Identifying the offending object breaks up the landscape, offering a chance for diversity with interest that extends at least three seasons, if not four.

Small trees make exceptional spot screens. Placed in an island bed near the sidewalk, the homeowner feels protected on the front porch—not completely hidden, but buffered. Set between houses built close together, a small tree effectively separates the properties.

Even the request for a "small tree" should lead to more questions. What kind of "small"? Tall and thin, such as *Quercus robur* Fastigiata? Short and fat, a disease-resistant flowering crab apple, perhaps. When in need of a big round ball, try *Styrax obassia* or *Pistacia chinensis*. Often when we think small, we visualize all parts diminutive, but shape makes all the difference.

A cluster of the pyramidal Foster's holly (*Ilex x attenuata* Fosteri) or one of the serviceberries, such as *Amelanchier x grandiflora* Autumn Brilliance creates a distinct form in the landscape. The bare trunks of small trees allow air circulation and a sense of openness that lets the garden breathe while hiding the view at eye level.

Part-Time Cover Up

Those previous examples are all deciduous. Time of year is another aspect of screening to keep in mind. Who cares if the neighbors are in their hot tub in December if the only time you seen them is in July when you're sitting out on the patio. If you can get the homeowner to realize that it's only a seasonal disturbance, then the world of screening possibilities grows exponentially.

Evergreens still make the grade, as part of a mixed hedge or a spot screen: Narrow-leaved mock privet (*Phillyrea angustifolia*) or the whorled foliage of *Trochodendron aralioides* in mild climates, *Viburnum awabuki* Chindo or one of the PJM hybrid rhododendrons.

Going the Distance

Perhaps it's just a sense of distance that's needed, not a screen at all. Covering something up can't always work. When we block a view, we may block access or decrease safety, but when we devise a buffer, we keep the world at arm's length.

If that's the case, the choices are vast. Blue holly (*Ilex x meserveae*), dwarf conifers, flowering shrubs such as abelia or any combination thereof can provide the separation.

Educating the homeowner about what plants do best is as easy as hooking up with a regional plant recommendation program – the Chicago Botanic Garden lists Illinois' Best Plants (www.bestplants.org); the Pacific Northwest has Great Plant Picks (www.greatplantpicks.org); Texas A&M highlights Earth-Kind plants (aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/earthkind/selector). GP

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