



SCREENING FOR SOLITUDE

From *Cupressus leylandii* to neighbours from hell. Steve McCurdy clarifies the new hedging laws and lets us in on Majestic's secrets on how to screen with style

WE BRITISH ARE some of the most friendly and hospitable people in the world, but when it comes to our gardens, especially the back garden, we like our solitude. It is just not comfortable to be able to see into the neighbour's place – or for them to see into ours – whether it be a swing set, patio, or (Heaven forbid!) a window. The mere prospect makes many of us rush down to the garden centre for a load of Leylandii.

Within a few years these fast-growing conifers have done their job, giving the peace and quiet we wanted.

Unfortunately, a few years after that, the struggle begins to stop them from taking over the neighbourhood!

The problem is that, although very controllable with regular pruning, it only takes a few seasons of neglect and these fast-growing conifers are out of ladder reach. At this point, the twice annual pruning exercise becomes a much bigger – and a more expensive – undertaking. Which is how Leylandii have earned their poor reputation, so much so that there is now legislation in place where it is illegal to let any evergreen hedge grow taller than two metres.

Even if your dear neighbours are happy to let you grow them up to five metres tall or more, this does not protect you should they sell the house and new neighbours move in who do object. If this should happen you will have no choice but

to get the chainsaw out and cut them down to two metres, thus exposing all the dead inner growth that will not regrow. Shortly afterwards you will no doubt find them such an eyesore you will have no choice but to dig them up and start again.



A pleached or espaliered deciduous aerial hedge can be much more attractive than a continuous line of evergreens

Furthermore, you may have heard about the new conifer aphid that has reportedly been attacking Leylandii and (if the RHS is right) may destroy up to 40% of Leylandii hedges. So, fast-growing conifers are no longer the easy solution they once were. What, then, is a person to do for a little privacy?

Firstly, we need to understand the hedging

law and what it says. It was made for good reason, due to thousands of complaints, to protect us all from inconsiderate, lazy neighbours who are quite happy to let their hedge grow to as much as 25 metres or more, because they happen to live on the sunny side or it. The unfortunate neighbour, however, ends up in perennial darkness, where little grows and with nothing to look at but a moss lawn! The law is not intended to rob us of our privacy, but simply to establish ground rules which protect us all. There are two simple rules:

First, do not plant multiples (i.e. two or more) of the same evergreens in a line along your perimeter. A continuous line of deciduous hedging, mixed deciduous and evergreen or a pleached/espaliered deciduous aerial hedge is fine.

Secondly, you cannot let any evergreen hedge exceed two metres without mutual consent, but as I said earlier, your future new neighbours can object. There are exceptions to this rule, such as if a higher hedge does not 'unreasonably restrict light to the property' as when it is set back from and within your boundary, or your neighbour lives on the sunny side of it and doesn't object.

So these are the ground rules, but what is the solution? That is a question we are asked most days at Majestic Trees. In our experience,

the best solution by far is to create a natural screen by planting a mixture of both evergreen and deciduous ornamental trees of various heights and sizes.

Mixed ornamental screens are the most cost-effective way to screen

With careful design, such a 'treescape' will not only hide an unsavoury view, it will replace it with an ever-changing beautiful one. Unlike high hedges, an ornamental treescape will age gracefully, adding character and value to the property with each passing year. And unlike high hedges, maintenance costs on established ornamental trees are negligible. In fact, mixed ornamental screens are the most cost-effective way to screen anything, either visually or from light and sound pollution. Walls and fences take time, are far more expensive, and will still be limited to two metres in height unless planning permission is sought. Unlike man-made structures, trees do not require planning permission, unless possibly in a conservation area, which means the transformation can take place relatively instantly. A carefully designed treescape will provide privacy that is 'green' not only in fabric but function, providing wildlife habitat, wind protection, compost, oxygen, and of course, amenity value for years to come.

Certainly, improving an outlook gives great personal benefit. Achieving this with a beautifully executed ornamental treescape also makes fantastic business sense as well, as many of our clients have seen their property prices increase by as much as ten times their investment. Some of these projects where we have helped people all over Great Britain 'improve their outlooks' using strategically designed 'treescapes' to screen out neighbouring homes, commercial buildings, hospitals, roads, mobile phone masts, railway lines, etc. (shown right) will hopefully give you inspiration. If not, give us a call and we will do our best to help you or your garden designer, landscape contractor, landscape architect, developer, estate manager, or you the home owner, to have a hassle-free, stress-free and wonderfully satisfying experience! ■

For additional information on the hedging law please Google 'hedgeline'.

Steve McCurdy is Managing Director of Majestic Trees, which grows and plants semi-mature trees, hedging and screening. Please call 01582 463881 or visit their website at www.majestictrees.co.uk for further information.



Grove Farm was a large farm that was bought by developers for conversion. The Georgian farmhouse was lovely, but the rear view of the pigsty did not appeal. The developer needed to sell the house separately to help pay for the redevelopment, so a major screening of specimen trees was installed to give the prospective owner privacy, and to hide the conversion of the pigsty to housing that would be done over the subsequent two years. It worked – as the pictures show!



A retired couple regularly enjoyed their beautiful, very mature garden until one day to their horror, their neighbours cut down a dense line of very tall conifers. Suddenly they could see this ugly two-storey block of flats and what their neighbours did in front of their windows is unprintable. They had completely lost their privacy and their estate agent told them they were looking at a £50,000 drop in property value. Majestic came in *et voilà* the flats are a distant memory.



This landscape designer's customer hated this shed belonging to their neighbour – it was not a pretty site. To help shield them from the view, we supplied and planted a dense woodland of mature native trees.



A large London home was a buyer's dream until they looked out of the back window. The view that greeted them negated any interest. Majestic craned over and planted this evergreen screen of large specimen trees, resulting in a ten-fold return on investment in trees.