

A Living Fence, a dense group of plants in a natural looking, multi-layered arrangement, provides a natural barrier on a property line, edge of a field, next to a stream or at the edge of a parking lot.

Why a Living Fence?

A living fence (a closely-planted arrangement of trees and shrubs) functions similar to a fence or hedge to create a visual screen, physical barrier, or windbreak. Unlike traditional fencing, living fences rarely need replacing when properly maintained. Living fences are a more naturally arranged alternative to hedges and require less intensive management than formal hedges. A living fence can also provide for the needs of wildlife – giving cover for nesting, shelter in winter, food sources and a safe travel lane for a variety of wildlife.

Planting Design

- ❖ Create multiple rows or layers of plants.
- ❖ Avoid straight lines of plants and offset any rows you may create.
- ❖ Select one or two larger plants to constitute the foundation and majority of the fence.
- ❖ Use four to six additional shrubs or small trees of various heights and widths.
- ❖ Place larger plants towards the middle for fences to be viewed from both sides or place them towards the back for fences visible from only one side.
- ❖ Mix plants for a “natural” feel.
- ❖ Space plants much closer together than is normally recommended. The optimum spacing depends on the mature size of the plants and growth rate.
- ❖ Select plants that will fit within the area at their mature size in order to reduce pruning and maintenance.
- ❖ Purchase plants in sizes that reflect their mature size, so that even when new, the fence has the structure and appearance it will ultimately achieve. For example, purchase the largest plants in 5 gallon containers, medium-sized plants in 2 or 3 gallon, and the smallest plants in 1 gallon containers.
- ❖ Select fire resistant plants when planting near buildings.

Plant Selection

- ❖ Choose plants adapted to the site conditions – wet or dry soil, sun or shade areas, for example.
- ❖ Native plants are often good choices, especially for attracting wildlife.
- ❖ Include both evergreen and deciduous plants.
- ❖ Select a variety of heights and widths.
- ❖ Choose plants that will establish quickly.

The Green Zone map is on page 2.

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Living Fence Plants

American Cranberry Bush (*Viburnum trilobum*)
 Serviceberry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*)
 Snowbrush Ceanothus (*Ceanothus velutinus*)
 Alpine Currant (*Ribes alpinum*)
 Curl-leaf Mountain Mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*)
 Snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*)
 Siberian Pea Shrub (*Caragana arborescens*)
 Mountain Ash (*Sorbus americana*)

Plants for Spokane Region were purchased from local nurseries through grant funds from Foundation Northwest.

Functions

- ❖ Screen views of buildings and parking lots.
- ❖ Create privacy by reducing views and access to an area.
- ❖ Buffer a sensitive area such as a wetland or stream.
- ❖ Block the wind for protection in the winter and direct cool breezes in the summer.
- ❖ Provide interest with flowers, fruit, and color.
- ❖ Provide wildlife habitat.
- ❖ Provide seasonal food for the homeowner.

Maintenance

A good design and the selection of appropriate plant material will result in a living fence that requires minimal maintenance once mature. Plants will spread and blend together. To ensure success, be sure to provide adequate water and nutrients during the establishment period of two to three years.

Mulch should be used to control weeds and to conserve moisture in new plantings. Drip irrigation systems are the most efficient way to get water to large linear areas. They also conserve water and help prevent weed growth.

If planting next to a road, site the fence far enough back from the right of way to avoid issues with obstructing traffic sight lines and damage to the fence due to spraying, mowing and/or snow removal. And remember to check with local utilities regarding buried lines -- “Call Before You Dig”

The Living Fence exhibit is # 14 on The Green Zone map. The Green Zone is located at the Spokane Conservation District and WSU/Spokane County Extension, 210 & 222 N. Havana, Spokane WA 99202.
 (509) 535-7274 (SCD)
 (509) 477-2048 (WSU)

Living Fence (continued)

THE GREEN ZONE

