



Garden q & a
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Winter Blooming Hedges

February 2

Question: Our Condo has a hedge of hibiscus bushes that is about 150 feet in length and is 20 to 30 years old. Plants are woody and not very attractive. They are trimmed yearly as a hedge. We are talking about tearing them out and starting over. Location is full sun in Cape Coral sandy soil. First, any chance of a severe pruning bringing them back? If not, what would be a good and not too expensive replacement that would stay green all year and provide color during the winter months?

- Josh R., Cape Coral

Answer: Twenty to 30 year old hibiscus plants are probably due for replacement. However, there is always a chance that severe pruning could reinvigorate some plants. Discuss this with your landscapers. Most plants are seasonal bloomers with a flowering niche sometime from spring through fall. Many that flower in winter are not suited as hedge material. Hibiscus is an exception to that rule for it flowers all year and can be trimmed as a hedge. You may consider replanting with hibiscus. The variegated "Snow Queen" has both interesting leaves and sustained bloom. Other possible exceptions are some of the bougainvilleas. Many bougainvillea cultivars flower more profusely in winter than in warmer months. 'James Walker' and 'Afterglow' make fine bougainvillea hedges. They are red and orange, respectively. Dwarf firebush flowers continuously from March through November and makes a reasonable good hedge. The native Simpson's stopper has small leaves, white fragrant flowers and exfoliating bark. It is not a dependable winter bloomer but it makes an ideal hedge. However, patience must be exercised as it is a slow grower. Other species that bloom in the winter, albeit with much less vigor than in the warm months, are bush allamanda and downy jasmine. It takes special maintenance to make these two into hedges. There are few others winter-flowering hedges. However, if unconventional can be appreciated then consider crinum lily. This giant lily grows to about 6 feet tall and flowers throughout the year. It will take about 18 months to form the semblance of an acceptable hedge. It may be fragrant at night. Removal of older leaves and spent inflorescence is necessary to keep it neat. No matter when they bloom, many flowering hedges are pruned so often that they practically become non-flowering. Consequently, proper pruning time and frequency are essential to get maximum or even acceptable colors from flowering hedges.

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