

All About Edging



A “smart” edging should harmonize with the rest of your landscape, suit your budget, and help reduce landscape maintenance. —Rita Pelczar

Why do we want to put edging around our gardens? From a practical standpoint, edging keeps grass from invading shrub or garden areas. It keeps pathway materials out of gardens and lawns. From a cost and maintenance standpoint, a raised edging prevents erosion by keeping soil and mulch from washing out of beds during heavy rains.

Additionally, decorative edgings serve as an attractive element to the landscape. If materials are selected that complement the style, color and materials used elsewhere on or around the house, they help unify the overall landscape.

Edgings give a crisp, neat and well-tended appearance. They define and highlight the spaces they enclose. They emphasize the profile of beds, borders and paths.

Deciding Which Type of Edging to Use

There are types of edgings to fit everyone’s taste, budget and style—formal or informal, subtle or bold, temporary or permanent, decorative or functional.

When selecting materials, answer these questions:

- Is your garden style formal or informal?
- How big is your budget?
- Will installation be difficult or costly?
- How much time do you want to spend on maintenance?

- Do you want a permanent edge that limits future expansion?
- Do you need an effective barrier between lawn and garden?

Are you doing the installation yourself? Begin by outlining the area. Use a rubber hose or heavy rope to indicate where the edge should be. For curves, adjust until you have a large, smooth curve that will be easy to mow. Also be sure to allow room for plants to grow to their mature size.

Cut-edge or Trench Edging

The most basic and least expensive edging is a simple cut edge that requires no installation of hardscape material and gives a clean edge that complements most landscaping styles.

Using an edger or a sharp flat spade, make a trench or V-shaped ditch 4 to 6 inches deep and wide, angling towards the bed so that grass roots cannot easily cross. The only maintenance required is to re-cut the edge once or twice during the growing season before the invasion of grass or plants becomes a nuisance. This type of edging allows for easy garden expansion.

Hardscape Edgings

Barrier type or raised edgings require the installation of a hardscape material (nonliving element of the landscape). These materials provide different degrees of durability and permanence.

► *Bricks and pavers*

Bricks and pavers are the best options for cost, durability and style. This type of edge controls spreading grasses and unruly plants, defines an area and reduces maintenance. Bricks and pavers come in numerous shapes and colors. They create strong, distinct edges even in an informal garden. They accommodate grade changes and curves better than wood. When installed flush with the ground, they provide a mowing strip, thus eliminating the need for using a weed trimmer. Bricks and pavers can be laid flat, on their sides, on end or laid at an angle for a saw-toothed effect. Interlocking pavers do not need mortar for a tight fit and can be used as a simple border or for raised beds and even garden walls.

► *Cement curbing*

Like brick and pavers, cement curbing is attractive and durable. However, it must be professionally installed. Cement also provides a mowing strip, but its permanence does not allow for easy expansion of the gardens in the future.

► *Gathered stone*

Gathered stone or random stone, like fieldstone or flagstone, are more informal. They can be stacked for raised beds or laid on edge but, unless the stones are mortared together, spreading turf grasses will quickly find their way into nooks and crannies. Unlike brick and concrete, there is no mowing strip and hand trimming of the lawn is required.

► *Landscaping timbers and railroad ties*

Landscaping timbers or railroad ties are popular, durable and relatively inexpensive. They can be used for straight edges on level ground as well as for raised beds if secured with long nails.

Wood gives an informal and weathered look. It will last for many years but will eventually rot. Conventional “two-by” lumber, as in 2 x 4’s, 2 x 6’s in redwood, cypress and cedar, are naturally rot resistant but more expensive. If installed flush with the ground, a wood edge eliminates the need to do frequent hand trimming. A raised wood edge adjoining the lawn requires a higher level of maintenance.

► *Other types of wood edging*

Sawn log rolls, short round logs, cedar shakes or bamboo sections set on end at equal or varying heights make a strong and attractive edging for a bed slightly raised above a lawn. Unlike timbers or railroad ties, these wood edgings can be used on curves. Once again, hand trimming is required if the beds adjoin a lawn area.

► *Metal and hard plastic polyvinyl*

Metal and hard plastic polyvinyl edging strips are reasonably priced and provide an underground barrier, but are lacking in aesthetics and should be installed so that only the top shows. Metal header board and lighter weight 14-gauge steel with attached stakes or special clips come in rolls or strips. Using painted metal will help to delay the onset of rust.

Polyvinyl strip edging comes in rolls with an upturned bottom edge and anchors to prevent heaving. The top edge is usually rounded and sits on the ground so it isn’t entirely invisible but is generally unobtrusive. Polyvinyl can be difficult to work with and difficult to install. Short sections of hard plastic designed to be pounded into the ground are easier to install in loose soil. Working with the strips in warmer weather makes them more pliable and easier to handle. Frost may cause heaving or cracking over time. Ground covers and grass can often grow over them, defeating their purpose.

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