

# Hedges – Nature's Defender of the Elements

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Hello Readers, Well, hopefully by now you are fully tuned in to my fortnightly column on gardening and irrigation here on the Algarve. My experience is gleaned from nearly 20 years experience of running a landscaping and irrigation business here. Many of the lessons I have learnt have come through trial and error – often thought as the best way – learning to adapt and change to the specific climate the Algarve is famous for.

Over the coming year I will be taking an imaginary garden through from start to finish, outlining ways to improve every part of your Portuguese garden using locally sourced plants and materials. My aim is to cover interesting advice for complete novices through to the more green fingered hobby gardeners, covering a whole host of different subjects such as types of landscaping, irrigation, organic gardening, plants, seeding, fertilizers, composting, ... the list goes on. Of course, if you feel there is a particular subject you want covered then please let me know and I will endeavour to fit it in.



Myoporum Laetum, Melaleuca and Nerium Oleander

know their pro's and con's.

## 1. Myoporum Laetum

A very prolific and cheap form of hedging, which can easily be grown from cuttings, and is one of the fastest growing hedge types here on the Algarve. Ideal for marking your boundaries and for coastal gardens as it can adapt very easily to the salt air. The downside is that it needs regular pruning to keep its shape as it has a tendency to grow tree-like, becoming very leggy and quite ugly. It often suffers with a sooty mould on the leaves – regular pruning will also help to eradicate this. Do not plant any shrubs close to the hedge as it has strong, solid and invasive roots – which are very difficult to remove once established. It will require watering throughout the summer.

## 2. Melaleuca

There are many species in this family, which is closely related to the bottlebrush and tea tree. Its oil can be used for aromatherapy and holistic remedies, but over the last 10 years it has become a popular favourite as a hedging plant. Like the Myoporum Laetum, it grows very quickly, withstands heat,

wind and most types of soil – and is easily adaptable to salt air. If you want a thick hedge I suggest you plant 2 rows in a diagonal planting pattern approx. 1 metre apart. The colour can change from a lime to dark green throughout the year and provides an attractive back drop to the garden. However, make sure you have very sharp shears when pruning as the branches are very sturdy, and watch out in the summer months as it's very popular with wasps who like to build small nests in the fine leaves.

## 3. Nerium Oleander

Probably my favourite for boundary hedging as it matches both of the above in tolerance to the conditions here on the Algarve but you have the added choice of some wonderful colours. The three main ones being white, pink and red but you can also get hybrid varieties in double red or double pink. You can mix and match giving 2 or 3 tones throughout your hedge which can be very striking.

So popular are they here it's rare to come across a garden without an oleander but don't let it grow too big as it will easily spi-

ral out of control. Clip it back after flowering to keep its shape and density. One word of warning – this plant is VERY TOXIC – all parts are poisonous so never use as a mulch, kindling or on a BBQ and wash your hands thoroughly after handling it.

All of these types of hedging plants can also be used as wind buffers to help protect more sensitive planting areas of your garden. If you plan to have a citrus orchard and are in an exposed area then plant a hedge against the wind and your oranges and lemons will appreciate the shelter and thrive much better.

These three species are probably the most commonly used hedging plants in the Algarve, but for more formed and delicate hedging where height is not a factor, then there are some magnificent species you can use.

Try the striking 'Weeping Bottlebrush' with its shower of red clusters. Keep this trimmed to a height of 1 metre and it will certainly turn heads in your gar-

den. Or the 'Bush Germander' (Teucrium), with its silver stems and grey and blue foliage and flowers. This would make a fantastic complimentary theme against a range of lavenders or salvias. Happy to grow to a height of 50cm it will become drought tolerant after a couple of years.

Other successful hedging plants to be found here are Myrtle, Pittosporum and the 'Red Robin Photinia'.

Make sure that when you plant any hedge, you dig a hole at least twice the size as the original pot the plant came in. Mix the excavated soil with some good fertilizer and water in well – and I mean well (see tips).

Justin Wride

For any questions or more information on any item discussed you can contact me on [jmwride@hotmail.com](mailto:jmwride@hotmail.com)

Next time: Ground Cover Plants

## PLANT OF THE WEEK

### Crocasmia 'Montbretia'

I have chosen this plant as it gets little attention in the plant world but this little gem will light up any garden at this time of year. These perennials from corms produce stunning and brightly coloured orange flowers. They can grow to a metre

high in sword like clumps and are unbelievably drought tolerant. The showy flowers will last a couple of months and then they retreat back to their original corms. You can then separate and plant more for the next winter dazzle of orange.



## TOP ALGARVE TIPS

1. When planting out any shrubs, fill up a large bucket or wheelbarrow with water and sit the potted plants in the water for at least 20 mins. This will give the roots a good drink before they go into the ground.
2. If the plant is pot bound you might have to cut the pot with a saw or secateurs, then tease the roots by gently disturbing and breaking them apart to encourage them to root quicker in the soil.

## GARDENERS TO DO LIST – FEBRUARY

1. Remove suckers from fig trees but wear gloves - beware of the sap as this can cause an itchy rash.
2. If your shrubs have been nipped by the frost, wait until the cold spell is over and then cut back the damaged foliage.
3. The rains will come this winter – so prepare wells around trees and shrubs in the dry earth otherwise the much needed water will simply run off the parched soil.

**JUSTIN WRIDE**  
GARDEN LANDSCAPING AND IRRIGATION

### GARDEN DIAGNOSTICS

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