

# At Home on Nantucket



## Creating a diverse & interesting yard

PHOTO CREDIT BY ROB BENCHLEY

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**D**riving around the island it may seem as though nearly everyone has a privet hedge and a grass lawn. Actually, local landscapers have created many diverse and unique yards by planting unusual hedges and using a mixture of ground covers that provide a striking combination of colors, textures and heights.

The standard privet hedge is popular on Nantucket because deer do not eat it, it is fairly inexpensive to install, it grows quickly and can be shaped in several different ways. Cost becomes a factor depending on how often the hedge needs pruning, how large it is and if that work is done by a gardening crew.

People like grass because it is soft to walk on, good for children to play on and is traditional, but it has its drawbacks. Grass needs frequent mowing,

and to achieve a lush look it requires fertilization and either mechanical or chemical weed control.

"Any of these chemicals, if not used judiciously, will get into our water system," said Robert Stark of Surfing Hydrangea Nursery, which carries a wide line of plant alternatives to grass and privet but does not do installation. "There are organic fertilizers and weed controls, but they can still be labor intensive and take a lot of time or money or some of each."

Stark, along with highly experienced landscapers Mike Misurelli of G & M Landscaping and Ted Godfrey, all have suggestions for plants that can take the place of grass and privet, are attractive, generally require low maintenance and are hardy in Nantucket's climate.

"People don't realize the sheer number of alternatives they have," said Godfrey, who actually prefers a varied and natural yard appearance.

For hedges, Rose of Sharon works well. It is dense, has pretty white or purple flowers in singles or doubles, grows tall and quickly and only needs an annual pruning in the spring before its greenery

emerges. There are many evergreen varieties that do not shed their leaves in winter. Upright holly can be grown as a hedge and will produce bright red berries if both female and male species are planted. The males can be planted anywhere in the yard because bees carry their pollen to the females. Holly, while hardy, grows best in areas fairly protected from harsh wind, said Stark.

Boxwood is a broad-leaf evergreen that makes good hedges and can reach up to 20 feet tall. Stark said some people wrap their boxwood in burlap for the winter or spray the plants with an anti-desiccant that coats the leaves with a waxy substance to retain water during the cold season. Boxwood, which also can be shaped many ways, likes an annual, well-balanced fertilizer and moist soil. It does possess an acrid odor at certain times of the year that some find offensive.

Stark said Leyland cypress is often used for Nantucket hedges. It grows fast and high and has

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