

Prunus / Laurel - Growing Guide

Growing Laurels

Prunus laurocerasus - Common laurel, and *Prunus lusitanica* - Portugal laurel, are ideal for planting as outer wind protection in exposed locations; the latter especially so in coastal situations.

At Burncoose and Caerhays the gardens rely on long thick laurel hedges right through the garden to protect more tender ericaceous plants from wind and allow them to prosper and grow on in smaller microclimates with wind protection. These hedges have been established, in some cases for 60 to 80 years, and, as you can see in these photographs, they are pruned back hard about every five years or so. They quickly regenerate whatever time of the year the pruning takes place. Older laurel hedges may well be up to 30ft high and around 15ft wide. Long pole pruners are needed to reach the tops of the hedges and now there is a chainsaw on a pole available for this purpose.

If starting a laurel screen or hedge from scratch the best approach is a double row of plants at around 9ft spacings planted alternately in the two rows. In full sun you will have a thick tall hedge of 15ft in height in as little as 10 years however much its leaves get blasted in the wind. In partial shade the growth rates for common laurel will be slower but they will still do well in shade and remove the under-draft from beneath a tree canopy. When we have started these hedges from scratch here we have usually incorporated a few larger quick growing beech trees or *Pinus insignis* to rise above the hedge.

Common laurel does have attractive terminal racemes of white flowers followed by cherry-like fruits which are red at first and black when ripe. When in flower in the spring these are nicely scented.

In the January 1990 hurricane there is no doubt that the outer laurel hedges saved the gardens here from even worse destruction. The most

westerly facing laurel hedges had all their leaves blown off but, after a good chop back, they regrew as vigorously as ever and continue to do their job today.

Common laurel can of course be kept clipped and trimmed into a rather more formal hedge at whatever eventual height you so wish. Ideal, as an evergreen, perhaps, for planting around a tennis court or swimming pool. The problem is however that this plant is so remarkably vigorous that you will probably need to clip it three times a year to keep it in shape.

Prunus laurocerasus 'Otto Luyken', the dwarf cherry laurel, will only grow to 4-5ft in maturity. It will not give the same privacy as a common laurel hedge but it will be much less trouble to maintain. Perhaps a better bet as an evergreen edging plant along a drive?

Portugal laurel will eventually also become tree-like with a large trunk but its speed of growth is again much less than that of the common laurel. It is therefore more useful as a privacy hedge at the boundary of the garden or as a more managed roadside hedge. You may get away with clipping this only once a year once it has reached the required height. This too makes a dense thick hedge. Unfortunately frequent trimming will mean few flowers.



Prunus lusitanica as a hedge

Annual pruning - Best done in October

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/VK4uNNDCrco>

Hard Pruning Laurel Hedge - Video Tip

Hard pruning of your laurel hedge will need to be done every 4 or 5 years.

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/qhDNXLmASuY>

Laurel Hedging Over The Years - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/DtDnnQDfnGM>

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