

Taxus - Care Guide

Growing Taxus

English yew

Burncoose stocks a number of forms of *Taxus baccata* with different growth habits and different foliage colours. The English yew is an iconic tree in many churchyards where it was grown specifically to produce wood for bows in medieval times. It is ideal for clipping into a hedge or more elaborate topiary designs which take an enormous amount of time to clip and maintain.

Those attempting an instant yew hedge with larger plants will be surprised at the cost. This is a slow growing tree! The temptation is therefore to purchase larger and cheaper root balled yews rather than more expensive and smaller pot grown ones. The problem with root balled yews is that you are far more likely to get a few failures in the new hedge especially in a dry summer than with smaller pot grown trees. When preparing the ground for a yew hedge it needs to be double dug with two layers of dung and the soil around the young hedge trees needs to be heavily mulched as well to preserve moisture and get the plants off to a good start.

The toxicity of yew berries to children or tortoises/rabbits housed under a yew tree must not be underestimated. All parts of yew trees are toxic. This is another reason why yew trees were grown in churchyards out of the reach of cattle and sheep.

Seeds from female yew trees can be sown in containers in cold frames once ripe. The seed may take more than one year to germinate.

T. baccata, if allowed to grow to its full height as a tree over, say, 10 decades, might achieve a height of 70ft with a spread of more than half that. Yellow male flower cones appear in spring and the juicy red fruits in September to October.

T. baccata 'Dovastonii Aurea', yellow yew, is a female variety with yellow margined leaves from golden yellow shoots. This is a spreading shrub growing to around 10-15ft with a smaller spread.

T. baccata 'Fastigiata', the Irish yew, has a columnar upright habit and is often a feature plant in churchyard avenues. If the elderly columns start to collapse out of the tree it responds perfectly well to a hard pruning from which it quickly recovers with a narrower shape. This tree grows to around 30ft after many years and is female. A young tree in the gardens here is scarcely 15ft high after 30 years.



Taxus baccata 'Fastigiata'

T. baccata 'Repens Aurea' is also a female shrub and is a spreading groundcover plant growing about 3-5ft tall with a similar spread. Ideal perhaps as the backdrop to a rockery?

T. baccata 'Semperaurea' is a slow growing male bush with gold new leaves turning to a rusty yellow later. Grows to around 15ft.

T. baccata 'Standishii' is a narrow columnar female form of 'Fastigiata' with golden yellow foliage. It grows only to around 5ft with a much smaller spread. This is perhaps a feature plant in a herbaceous border.

Yew Hedge Trimming - Video Tip

Annual hedge trimming of your *Taxus* (yew) hedge will keep it looking good and under control.

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/Cob1ZRm-aR8>

Poisonous Yew Seeds In Autumn - Video Tip

View this video on Youtube here <https://www.youtube.com/f9P2iKAoG9c>

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