

Life on the Edge

Helping your customers choose the right edging product the first time around can save time and labor, not to mention conserve the integrity of the original landscape design.

By Daniel Martin

A well-planned landscape design is created by a series of lines. Whether these lines are curved or straight, it is imperative to the design that they remain crisp throughout the project's lifetime. To maintain the lines that create the landscape design, it is necessary to use a proper landscape edging.

The correct usage of landscape edging can save the user time, labor and money over the lifetime of the project and ensure the design remains visually appealing. Without the presence of an edging, a landscape design can begin to migrate over time, causing the design to lose its original intent.

Applications

Landscape edgings are used for many differing applications in today's world, but only a few applications make up the majority of edging use. The most common use of landscape edging is to divide a landscaping or flowerbed from the lawn. The edging is used to create a permanent border between the grass and the soil, rocks or mulch in the bed area. This prevents grass from spreading into the bed, and it also helps keep the mulch or rock from spilling into the lawn.

Another popular use for landscape edging around the house is a maintenance line. These are borders around the house or a fence line, often filled with stone, which catch water runoff and prevent the need to mow right up to the building or object. Edging is necessary in this application to separate the grass from the stone or gravel.

Similar to the maintenance line, a tree ring is used to circle the trunk of a tree to prevent the need to mow right up to the tree. The area is often filled with mulch or flowers, and the edging creates a separation of this from the grass.

Choosing an Edging

When it comes to choosing an edging, there can be many decisions. One of the most critical elements of edging is the way that it connects. The connection must be strong to prevent the joints from coming apart due to ground movement. A built-in, permanent connection system is preferable to using separate connection accessories.

A wide variety of materials is used in landscape edgings that are manufactured in today's market. In order to achieve maximum performance, it is important to understand the difference in the various edging materials.

Aluminum is a durable, easily formed, lightweight metal that is perfect for landscape use. Aluminum is nontoxic, has excellent corrosion resistance, and is 100 percent recyclable. Because aluminum is a tough metal that will not rust, rot or crack, it is extremely well suited to resist the demands of Mother Nature, professional lawn maintenance and home power equipment. When properly installed, aluminum edging and restraints will never need to be replaced and should remain beautiful for the life of the project.

Steel is also very popular among landscape professionals for its durability, ability to hold landscape lines in place and resistance to rot. When working with steel edging, it is important to be aware that steel can be quite heavy and can rust over time. Steel edging is not well suited for play areas, as the top of the edging is not rounded, leaving sharp corners.

Plastic edgings have become very popular thanks to their low cost. There are many styles and quality levels of plastic available on today's market, and a professional must be careful to choose a high-quality product. Many plastic composites, such as polypropylene and polyethylene are susceptible to direct sunlight and the freeze-thaw cycle, and will work their way out of the ground in what is called frost heave. Also, many plastic edgings do not have a permanent connection system.

Wood edging and bender boards, while popular in the past, are rarely used by landscape contractors today. Despite its natural beauty, wood's lack of durability makes it unsuitable for most professional design applications.



A permanent, stakeless connection system will provide the best performance, as well as speed up installation.

A more recent development in landscape edging, concrete curbing, is growing in popularity and is available in a variety of shapes, colors and patterns. This kind of edging requires a special curbing machine and a trained operator to install. While providing a permanent installation, concrete curbing can develop cracks and chips over time, and is not ideal for cold climates.

Brick and stone, while appealing to the eye, are more expensive forms of edging and, in effect, borders. They last a long time and can give a nice look to the edge. However, bricks and stones can eventually shift out of place. Vegetation can also creep into the cracks. In a climate where frost heave occurs, cementing bricks and stones is not a suitable option.

Natural edging, also known as spading or trenching, means digging a line along the turf and flowerbed. With no physical barrier to define the two, you will need to redefine the edge each year or sometimes more frequently, causing the bed edge to migrate. Expenses and related work can add up in the long run.

Edging Maintenance

To keep landscape edging in place, stakes are typically used. The type of staking system used can make a noticeable difference in how well the edging performs. For proper staking, it is important that the edging have premanufactured pockets, or loops, for the stakes to be placed through. Some materials require the stake be driven through the edging by hand, requiring extra labor and possible weakening of the edging.

There are many different types of stakes available with edging as well. The deeper the stake goes into the ground, the better its holding power. A barbed stake will also provide more holding power, as it helps prevent the stake from coming back out of the ground due to compaction and friction. Many higher-quality edgings will also have a system to lock the stake into the loop and tie the whole system together, creating the best defense against frost heave.

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