



Growing native boxwood (*Veronica elliptica*)

Why boxwood?

First, some praise for our native boxwood! It's our tallest native shrub, reaching three meters, and completely covers some small islands making them pretty cool but tricky to walk across! Large boxwoods must once have been common, and were even used to make furniture. Boxwood is eaten by sheep and cattle so nowadays it is often restricted to cliff edges or garden hedges.

Small birds love to perch in boxwood making it a great native plant for wildlife areas. It can also help to stabilise coastal areas including dry, low-fertility soils. A number of funding initiatives are available to help restore boxwood areas. These include Falklands Conservation's Small Grants, or, where planting to help restore degraded farmland, support may be available through the Department of Agriculture's Farm Improvement Plan.

Spring or early summer is a good time to start off young boxwood – but they can probably be started at any time of year. Growing from seedlings or cuttings is easy and doesn't need any special kit, just a bit of patience. Once you have identified a good parent plant you can collect seedlings or take cuttings and after a year you should have some sturdy shrubs to plant out.

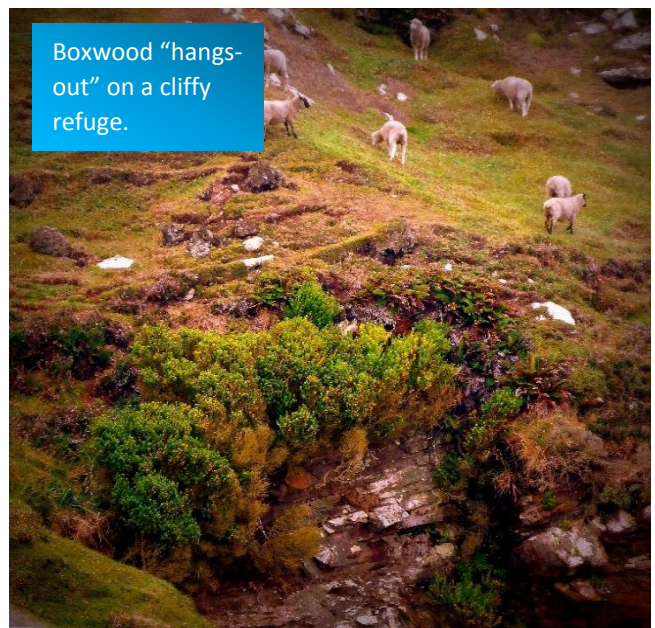
Selecting a parent!

Our native boxwood has small leaves and pale, usually white, flowers. Over the years keen gardeners have introduced lots of ornamental varieties; these often have larger leaves and dark purple flowers: they hybridise readily with native boxwood. To be sure that you have native boxwood collect cuttings or small plants away from town or settlements. Where possible it's best to use boxwood cuttings from the coast closest to your planting area.



Growing from seedlings

Boxwood often seed prolifically – if you have an area with lots of seedlings you can pot some up and keep them well watered outside (in a shady area initially until their roots have established). The plants should be ready for planting out in about a year – or when roots begin to appear at the bottom of their pot.





Growing from cuttings

Cuttings can be a sturdy alternative to seedlings, here's how to get them growing:

1. Select a healthy growing stem – it will be greenish and not too woody. Aim for up to 15cm (6") long. Don't use stems with flowers or let the cuttings dry out – keep them in a pot of water if not using immediately.
2. Either: gently pull the stem away from the main branch so you are left with a small "heel" (this can be neatly trimmed if it's straggly). Or cut off a longer stem and then use a sharp knife (secateurs or blunt knives crush the stem) to cut diagonally between two leaf joints (these are clearly visible rings around the stem).
3. Strip leaves from bottom half of the stem. You can dip the cut end of stem in rooting hormone but it's not essential.
4. Fill a pot with potting soil (can be a mixture of homemade compost and sand) and moisten well. Make a hole in the compost and firm the bottom half of your cutting in well. If you have a large pot you can stick in multiple cuttings.
5. Pop in a sheltered area outside and keep well-watered.
6. After about two months you should start to see small roots appearing through the bottom of your pot. As soon as this happens pot all rooted cuttings into individual pots (pots should be around 17cm / 7"). Keep watering them well.
7. After about a year you should have some good sturdy plants ready for planting out.

Now watch your boxwood forest grow and hear some happily chattering birds!

P.S. This works with fachine and we've just tried native lavender....

More information

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Thanks

Many thanks to Sally Blake (who kindly passed on techniques she learned from a course with Bob Reid at the DoA), Sue Morrison and Cynthia Williams (Stanley Nurseries) for their top tips.



Boxwood cuttings with a heel (left, including close-up) and cut diagonally between leaf joints (right).



Freshly planted cuttings.



A Siskin in boxwood on Sealion Island.