

## Neat, Easy-care Screens for Cape Gardens

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Tough, evergreen hedges and screens, either formally clipped or allowed to take on a looser form, are critical components to help deflect and filter the famous Cape winds. These strong elements provide sheltered places in which to enjoy the garden and plant more wind tender species that would otherwise curl up their toes and die. Clipped hedges can also save on space in small gardens or narrow areas where high screens are needed, but space is limited.

The winter rains provide perfect planting conditions in which to establish new trees and shrubs. Choose from this small selection of medium- to fast-growing, easy-care species; their foliage is dense and takes well to pruning.

*Tarchonanthus camphoratus*: Exuding a strong camphor-like fragrance, the Camphor Bush is arguably the toughest shrub to plant in the teeth of a famous Cape wind; coping with the drying salt air, frost and drought, it is a plant for extreme conditions. It has all the attributes needed to provide a shelterbelt – ground-level, dense foliage, multi-stemmed and is easy to prune. The fast-growing Camphor Bush ( 2 – 9 m) is better suited to tall, loosely formed screens; otherwise trimming will be too frequent. Grey leaves are an attractive and subtle backdrop to the striking colours of the celebrities of the Fynbos Kingdom. Fluffy white seed heads form dense heads from March to November and are used by birds to line nests. Prune lightly after flowering ends. Note that the Camphor Bush is dioecious, with male and female flowers on separate trees.

Narrow, two-toned leaves and pale yellow flowers on show for many months make the Pambati Tree, *Anastrabe integerrima*, one of the most attractive screening options. A compact root system, small size (3 – 5 m) and fast growth, makes it an excellent choice for small gardens, and dark green leaves with silver-white undersides make a lovely show throughout the year. Flowering begins in October, continuing through to May, beautiful pale yellow pouches with a dark maroon dollop tucked inside, and softly fragrant, and shrubs will flower in the first year. These are followed by small seeds that persist until July. It is easily pruned to the width and height required, and this is best done at the end of winter. Formal hedges will need frequent trimming while establishing. The Pambati Tree tolerates dry soils and rocky slopes, and both sun and light shade.

*Carissa macrocarpa* & 'Green Carpet': commonly planted as a low-growing groundcover, this cultivar will revert to the growth habits of a full-sized specimen if the thick stems are not clipped on a regular basis. As a shrub, it is an excellent screening with smaller leaves and a more compact growth form than its lookalike, *C. macrocarpa*. It will thrive in humid climates, and strong sea winds, in well-draining soils, in full sun or light shade. It is sensitive

to freezing temperatures and frost, and growth rate will be slower in cold, wet winters. Dense leaf form makes it easy to clip the shrub into a neat shape. Star-like white flowers dot the dark green leaves from September to January.

*Diospyros scabrida*: providing thick foliage from the ground level up to 2 – 3 m, this *Diospyros* species makes a most attractive hedge and windscreen. The multi-stems and somewhat rigid branches and dense foliage filter the wind efficiently. Brightly coloured fruits, striped pale green and scarlet, cover the shrub through Autumn to early winter, tucked among the glossy leaves, with white to cream flowers on show in spring and summer. It copes well in shallow soils and on rocky slopes, and is particularly useful in the calcareous and acidic soils found in many Cape gardens. *D. scabrida* is a rather slow grower but is thus easy to keep neatly trimmed. It prefers a sunny aspect and has moderate water needs until established.