

Question: I think this summer heat and drought has killed my Leyland cypress screen planting. What do you suggest as replacement plants to produce a dense screen?

Answer: Many plants have succumbed to this year's extreme drought but few plants have suffered more than Leyland cypress. I am in the same boat you are with some ten year old Leyland cypress that are dying quickly. There are a couple of serious diseases that these plants contract and they are exacerbated by the stress of the drought. The most prevalent one this summer is called "Bot" canker or dieback. Unfortunately, all you can do is remove the diseased limbs. If the problem is severe it may be best to do what you are suggesting with your question and replace them with more suitable plants.

The reason we got into the problem we have with Leyland cypress is because the plant was over hyped and over used as a fast growing screen. It is not nearly as well adapted as once believed. It does not do well in excessive wet or dry sites or in heavy clay soils. They are frequently planted much too close which leads to increased disease and stress related problems. The good news is "I just saved a bunch of money on my car insurance". Seriously, there is some good news. There are lots of super substitutes for a variety of soils and moisture conditions.

The key to choosing the proper substitute is to do a thorough site analysis prior to planting. You want to know things like the light exposure now and in the future (any trees that will cause shade later). The type soil and how well it drains is of critical importance. Will the plants be irrigated regularly or be on their own after the first year (all plants need irrigation the first year)? How tall does the screen really need to be to serve the purpose you intend? Do you have plenty of width space or do you need a very narrow single row of plants? Consider how these plants fit into the overall landscape design (ultimate size, leaf texture, shadows/shade).

If you want a similar leaf texture and plant form to the Leyland cypress you may consider, Arizona cypress for dry sites in full sun or 'Green Giant' arborvitae for moist, well drained, full sun locations. *Cryptomeria japonica* will make a fine tall screen in sites with afternoon shade. However, I think all of these have some drawbacks that may make them less desirable than many broadleaf evergreens.

There are a plethora of choices in the broadleaf evergreen category. Many of these have the added benefit of flowers, fragrance or even fruit for birds and wildlife. If width is not an issue might consider the dwarf forms of Southern magnolia such as 'Alta', 'Brackens Brown Beauty' and 'Edith Brown'. Staying with magnolias you may consider Sweetbay magnolia which is tolerant of fairly wet conditions and heavy clay soils. The cultivars 'Henry Hicks' and 'Santa Rosa' are mostly evergreen.

Some of the best and toughest plants for screens are hollies. *Ilex x attenuate*, which includes both 'Foster's' and 'Savannah' holly are nice tall narrow hollies adapted to all kinds of soils and full to part sun conditions. If you have a little more space I really like luster leaf holly (*Ilex latifolia*) and the very common 'Nellie R. Stevens' holly. Our native tall yaupon (*Ilex vomitoria*) and dahoon hollies (*Ilex cassine*) should not be

overlooked either. For fragrance you can't beat fragrant tea olive (*Osmanthus fragrans*) or Fortune's tea olive (*O. x fortunei*). I have a 20 foot tall loquat at my home that would work great as a tropical looking screen to screen off a pool from view. These are just a few of the great substitutes you might consider. The key to success is choosing the right plant for the place you have and giving the plants room to grow. Having more than one species in a mixed border is a good way to hedge your bet but you need a fairly wide area to make this work aesthetically. You can enter any of the scientific and cultivar names in a Google image search to get an idea of what they look like. Also, you may go to <http://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheets/hgic1025.htm> for a fact sheet on Leyland cypress alternative plants their various potential uses.