

Shearing Leyland Cypress

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Leyland cypress has dramatically increased in popularity over the last few years with most Christmas tree producers devoting greater percentages of their production to Leyland. Because Leyland differs in growth habit from Virginia pine one of the most common questions growers ask is “What is the recommended way to shear Leyland cypress?” The editors of The Georgia Christmas Tree Assoc., Inc., **TREE TALK** asked several growers throughout the state that have been producing Leyland cypress for many years about their practices.

Bill Murray, Cordele, GA The trees should go into spring in reasonable shape. After the first growing season the trees are basal pruned. Double stems are cut to leave a single stem. When the trees are 36 inches tall, they should receive a general shearing between May 1 and June 1. This would usually be the third year. They receive a second shearing in late August or the first week of September. These shearing are repeated in the fourth year. Sale trees receive an inspection clean-up using hand clippers in late October. Bill has about 95% No. 1 grade trees and as high as 98%.

Eddie Roberts, Byron, GA It depends on the size of the tree and how well it is filled out. The tree may be trimmed to hold it back or to fill it out. Regular trimming begins when the tree is 5-6 feet tall. These would be trimmed in April. They would receive a late trimming in the later part of May. Trees are usually trimmed twice and the tops are touched up in September. Trimming is based on the size of the tree and how well it is filled out.

Mickey Harp, Fayetteville, GA His Leyland cypress are basal pruned when they are 18-24 inches tall making an 8-10 inch handle. In the second year when they are waist high, about 36-42 inches, competing leaders are cut back. The top leader may also be cut back to encourage thickening. In the third year he trims the Leyland cypress after he trims his pines. Sale trees are given a light touch-up in October or November. He likes the later time because earlier regrowth tends to be light yellow. He colors his cypress and likes to do this immediately after trimming before any browning occurs. He skips the November shearing for a percentage of his trees since a number of his customers like a more natural look. He also varies his shearing if he wants to hold some trees back.

Ed Ruark, Bostwick, GA He has no standard schedule. It depends on when he can get to it. His white pines receive priority since their shearing is more critical. He tries to finish before July 4th. However, he plays loose with the Leyland cypress since they can be sheared anytime during the year. Sale trees are touched up in July. 3-3½ foot trees are touched up. When 4 feet tall they are sheared at the end of the second year. Three year trees are sheared three times. Fourth year trees are sheared as early as possible.

¹1996. Shearing Leyland Cypress. Georgia Christmas Tree Assoc., Inc., Tree Talk Vol. 10, No. 2, p 13.