



# Making Beautiful Garden Bed Edges

By Debi Tonks

**H**ow can you tell a well-executed design every time? Check the edges. It can be a house, a magazine, your clothes, or your yard, the principle always applies. If the edges are good, the design will look nice, crisp, and professional. Not only that, but upkeep is just a little easier. If you focus on the edges when you maintain that item, it's easier to make the whole thing look better. This is why people trim their yards around driveways and walkways. But what do you do around flower and garden beds to keep them looking nice?

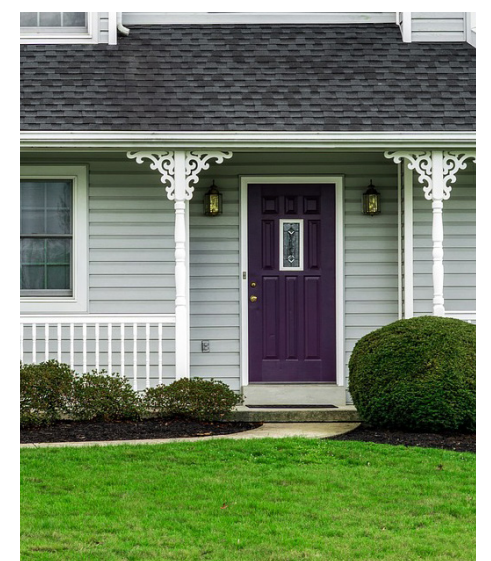
You don't need to be a professional to create a nice, crisp edge, and you don't need to spend a lot of money buying materials for one either. All you really need is one good flat-head shovel. A half-moon turf edger is nice, too (really nice, in fact), but it is not required. [Figure 1]

When you learn how to cut a natural edge, you will have a beautiful bed that will make your neighbors think you hired someone to put it in.

## Getting it Done

### The Cut

The main idea with a natural edge is to create an edge that will deter grass from spreading into the bed while holding in the mulch that retains the moisture for your plants. The edge on the grass side is cut straight down four inches deep, then slopes up into your bed at about a 45 degree angle. (Remember, this is more an art than a science, so if your soil slopes a little more or less than 45 degrees, you're just fine.) [Figure 2] The straight cut is deeper than most of your grass roots, and with only light mulch being next to it, the roots are discouraged from growing into it.



Of course, nothing is fool-proof, and you will have to do some maintenance each spring, but this cut does a pretty good job of making the work minimal.

A half-moon turf edger makes the initial cut easy, because it is built to cut four inches deep and no more. If you are using one of these, be sure that the top flanges point toward the grass. That is what will keep the blade from going deeper than four inches. [Figure 3]

If you are using a flat-head shovel to make this initial cut, do your best to estimate. You can really only measure how deep your cut is after the 45 degree cut is made, but adjustments are easily made after that.

One good way I like to measure the four inches is to use my hand. On a typical hand, four inches is about the length of the tip of your pointer finger to the crook of your thumb. So, if you make an "L" with your finger and thumb, then point down into the cut, your thumb should

touch your sod at the same time that your fingertip touches the bottom of your cut. [Figure 4]

When your bed comes against another barrier, like a driveway or walkway, be sure to still put in the 45 degree cut so that your mulch will have a barrier to contain it. [Figure 5]

The 45 degree cut helps bring the soil in your bed back up so that your bed looks more like the eye-catching beauty it should be. However, if your bed is against your house, do not put in the 45 degree cut. You do not want water to stay by the foundation. [Figure 6]

### Shaping the Soil

When it comes to shaping the soil, you want to allow the water to run towards the edges and not pool in the middle. If your bed is against your house, shape the soil so that it gently raises towards your house. This allows water to run away from your house, which is healthier for your foundation. [Figure 6]

If your bed is not against your house, the highest point should be in the center, gently sloping towards the edges. This gives the nice, rounded hill effect that makes your bed look more professional. It also prevents pooling where you don't want water. Letting the extra water pool in the edge helps keep your plants healthy. [Figure 7]

### Weed Barrier and Plants

Once your bed is edged and shaped, it is ready for weed barrier and planting. I prefer a nice, natural weed barrier. Things like newspaper (put on good and thick! At least eight layers!), cardboard, or masking paper (again, with a few layers) work well. Make sure that all edges overlap by at least six inches. When you lay it down, have the edges meet with the bottom of the edge you cut. It may take some patience to work around existing plants, but it will be worth it. [Figure 8]

When the barrier is down, cut out areas and plant any new plants. Try to keep any dirt in the hole you cut.

Dirt on the weed barrier will make it easier for weeds to grow later.

### The Mulch

Adding mulch will help retain moisture and prevent many weeds. A good mulch will also feed the soil. There are many things you can use, but I prefer to get mulch from a local tree cutting service. When you get mulch from there, it is the chopped form of an entire tree, which gives much nutritional value to your bed. Unfortunately, it also comes with large chunks of wood. For this, I use a screen of one inch hardware cloth attached to a wooden frame that fits over my wheelbarrow to sift the smaller bits I want to use from the larger bits. [Figure 9] After pouring a bucket of wood chips on the screen, I work my hands back and forth to get the smaller bits to fall through. I do not shake the screen, because I like my back and don't want to hurt it. [Figure 10] Once the wheelbarrow is full, I transfer that load to my bed. Try to maintain at least four inches of mulch throughout the bed. Don't

Figure 1 coming soon

Figure 2 coming soon

Figure 3 coming soon

Figure 4 coming soon

Figure 5 coming soon

Figure 8 coming soon

Figure 9 coming soon

Figure 10 coming soon

Figure 6 coming soon

Figure 7 coming soon

be afraid to go deeper as long as you are at least six inches away from the edge! The more mulch you have, the more protection from weeds, and the more your plants will be fed as the mulch decomposes.

## Upkeep

### Mowing

When you mow along this edge, simply run your mower next to it. If you accidentally overlap the edge a bit, there shouldn't be a problem. The mulch should be level with your sod, so the blades on your lawn mower shouldn't be in the way. Just be careful for plants. After mowing,

you will need to edge a bit with your trimmer.

### Renewing

Every Spring, you may need to do a little touching up to keep your edge looking sharp. To do that, simply rake your mulch back into the bed and trim up that four inch cut and 45 degree angle so that it's nice and clean again. Pull the mulch back into the trench, and tidy up the bed by pulling any weeds and shaping the mulch. Every year or two you will need to add a bit more mulch to maintain that four inch (or more) depth further in. Once you do that, you're ready for a new year.

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