

How verbal hedges can get you out of yard work

Written by By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
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At the dawn of every springtime, I make a list of things I want to do in my lawn and garden. This year, I hope to grow items to make salsa, increase the amount of native perennials growing, add mulch, use compost, finish my brick edging project from last year and get the kids to help me. Is this list too ambitious? Should I hedge my bets here (much as I intend to prune some hedges)?

While I'll admit my outdoor to-do list is too lofty, I can't wait to try to make all these things happen. I love working in the yard. I would never say I "kind of" like working in the yard, because my yard work enjoyment is unequivocal.

If I did want to play it safe, I'd employ a "verbal hedge," which is a word or phrase used to lessen the impact of a statement. The "hedge" in this phrase (just like "hedge your bets") has nothing to do with shrubbery; back in 1500s England, the verb "hedge" meant to "equivocate or avoid commitment." We find an example of this usage in Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* : "I, I, I myself sometimes, leaving the fear of God on the left hand and hiding mine honour in my necessity, am fain to shuffle, to hedge and to lurch."

While I prefer making "shrubby" references (thank you, Monty Python), I'll have to stick with hedges for now. After all, a bird in the hand is worth two in the hedge.

Here are some examples of verbal hedges:

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“Maybe I’ll go to the lawn and garden expo this weekend.” This noncommittal “maybe” expresses uncertainty about making firm plans for the speaker’s weekend plans.

“The movie was kind of good, but I was confused by Nic Cage’s character.” Saying a phrase like “kind of” makes the speaker’s opinion of the movie less forceful. Was the movie good or not? “Kind of” doesn’t commit either way.

“As far as I know, I had no knowledge of the plans to steal the zoo’s only walrus.” You’ll see defendants in court hedge all the time. If someone uses a phrase like “as far as I know,” this absolves them from saying, “I definitely knew about the walrus theft” or “I certainly did not know about the walrus theft.”

The next time you want to get out of helping your significant other with yard work, feel free to use verbal hedging — it could get you out of trimming the shrubbery.

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