

Hedgerow Species

When planting in the gaps in hedges (“gapping up”) use native plants of locally common species². In this area these include: hawthorn, hazel, crab apple, field maple, dog/field rose, blackthorn³, holly, oak, ash and small-leaved lime. When planting in existing hedges, gaps must first be thoroughly cleared of vegetation and the hedge on either side cut back to healthy growth. Plant between November and March when the ground is not frozen. Keep your new plants free of competitive weeds and remember to water them – often.

One plant which should normally be cut out of a hedge is elder since it grows faster than all other hedgerow plants and crowds them out. It is also very brittle and useless in any hedge intended to provide a stockproof barrier.

Grants

Defra’s Environmental Stewardship is a new scheme that pays farmers and owners of small fields to manage their land in ways that benefit the environment. Payments can help with the cost of hedgerow restoration as part of an overall land management agreement. Many members of the Parish Grasslands Project are already benefiting from an earlier, similar scheme, Countryside Stewardship. For more information speak to a committee member, or contact the Defra Helpline on 08459 335577.

This leaflet is intended as a basic, introductory guide to managing hedgerows to benefit the environment. It has been written with reference to Defra’s Countryside Stewardship guidance and the website www.hedgelayar.freereserve.co.uk

Parish Grasslands Project HT04 Feb/2005

² Parks Farm Nurseries, Ledbury Rd., Newent 01531 820620

Lynders Forest Nursery, Ross-on-Wye 01989 780212 www.lynders.co.uk

³ Note: blackthorn suckers vigorously encroaching into a field unless kept in check.



St Briavels, Hewelsfield & Brockweir Parish Grasslands Project

Hedgerow Maintenance

**A basic guide to managing
hedgerows to maximize their benefit
to wildlife**

Whilst many take hedgerows for granted as a natural feature of our countryside, hedges can only survive and flourish with correct management. Today, neglect and incorrect management are responsible for more hedgerow loss than outright removal.

Regional variations in custom and practice mean that opinions differ widely on the “correct” way to manage a hedge. The aim of this leaflet is to outline hedgerow management practices that are generally considered to increase the value of hedgerows to wildlife.

Correctly managed, hedgerows are a valuable wildlife habitat providing a rich source of food for birds and small mammals.

Today, relatively few hedges "work for a living" as stock-proof boundaries but they do provide shade for stock and protection from the wind and a guard against soil erosion. Hedges may also link otherwise isolated wildlife habitats thereby creating valuable wildlife corridors.

Maintenance of Hedgerows

Vigorous, healthy hedges require only regular trimming to keep them to the required height and width and to encourage bushy growth. Today this is universally achieved using tractor-mounted hedge-cutting equipment. Done correctly - cutting twigs rather than major stems - mechanised cutting can achieve satisfactory results, as regrowth in subsequent years will show.

Trimming should follow the direction of any previous hedgelaying to minimise damage to the wood. It is best done in late winter, in January or February, when any berries will have been eaten and before nesting begins. It should not take place annually as most plants will not flower on year old wood. Defra's Countryside Stewardship guidance suggests that trimming should take place no more than twice in every five years and it should be rotated to avoid cutting all the hedges in the same year. An exception is the road side of a hedge which might need to be trimmed earlier and more often for safety reasons.

For maximum benefit to wildlife¹, it is suggested that trimmed hedges are managed so as to reach and then maintain a minimum height of two metres. However, this might not be appropriate on every field boundary since the shade from tall hedges and trees can encourage weeds to establish along the edges of fields and create difficulties for drying hay crops in meadows.

¹ On sites where the wildlife aim is to increase the breeding success of grassland birds, be aware that trees and hedges can harbour avian and mammal predators.

Boundary Trees

Existing boundary trees offer additional benefits to wildlife and should be protected and maintained. Ideally, this means no supplementary feeding of stock, no storage of materials or machinery, no cultivation or weed control within three metres of the base of the tree and tree surgery should be limited to work essential to the safety of people or livestock. Where practical, fallen branches should be left in a shady location to help conserve dead-wood invertebrates and fungi.

One problem associated with mechanised hedgecutting is the decline in the number of saplings left in hedges to grow into mature trees. Any saplings that seem suitably placed to grow on into boundary trees will need to be protected from trimming.

Restoration of Hedges

A healthy hedge can normally recover well from severe cutting but repeated over zealous cutting can gradually cause whole hedges to die off. However, neglect rather than the flail is the main enemy of hedges. As hedges grow, they gradually become more tree-like and less bush-like; gaps tend to appear lower down and they cease to provide an effective barrier. At this point, the hedge should be allowed to grow sufficiently tall so that it can be laid, both to fill in the gaps and to ensure the long term viability of the hedge by promoting vigorous regrowth from the base of the hedge.

Coppicing a hedge, i.e. cutting it off completely at just above ground level, is also a valid way of restoring hedges where the temporary loss of the hedge is not an issue. Coppicing will often take place in conjunction with the planting up of any gaps in the hedge and is the best treatment for very overgrown hedges.