

HEDGES IN CHURCHYARDS

A hedge between keeps friendships green!

Many churches have historic, ancient hedge boundaries comprising a variety of species of hedgerow shrub. They are an important habitat for a large variety of plant and animal species and a cherished feature of our countryside.

Hedgerows may be locally distinctive and The Countryside Agency has assessed locally distinctive hedgerows in England. Within the Hereford Diocese, for example, two distinct types of fruit hedgerow occur - Mixed thorn hedges with fruit tree standards and damson-dominated hedges. In addition, hedgerows may provide a refuge for locally distinctive flora such as wild daffodils in Worcestershire.

Well-managed hedges have a greater wildlife value per foot of ground space than almost any other British habitat. Features include:

- Flowers on the trees within the hedge itself providing nectar and then berries.
- Thorns to keep away predators for anything that might nest there.
- A dense structure with abundant leaves providing shelter and roosting sites.
- Grasses and wildflowers at the base.
- Hedgerows are essential corridors and flight paths to aid travel from one place to another for birds, bats, small mammals and insects.

Surveying a hedge

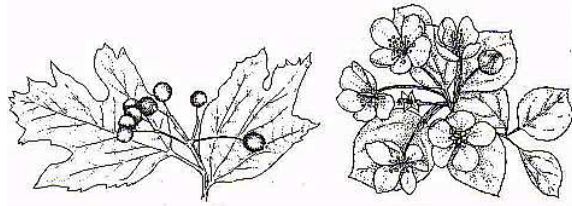
Ancient hedges, pre 1700, are very different from more recent hedges. Look for the following features to see if the hedge is ancient:

- 1 Irregular shape, often on a slight bank.
- 2 Old pollarded trees or coppice stools within the hedge.
- 3 A large number of different plant species growing in the hedge.
- 4 A rich ground flora at the base eg bluebell, red campion.
- 5 Old hedges which used to form woodland boundaries may have species such as yellow archangel, wood anemone and bluebell



Hazel

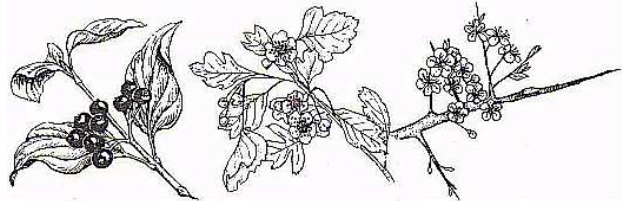
growing at the base.



Guelder rose and crabapple

Some common hedgerow species include

Guelder rose	Dogwood	Field maple
Holly	Wych Elm	Hazel
Dog/field rose	Ivy	Hawthorn
Ash	Yew	Blackthorn



Dogwood, hawthorn and blackthorn

Creating a hedge

If a churchyard extension is required, consider creating a new hedge around it. Look around for other natural hedges close to your church and see what species are present. If your hedge is to form a boundary with the countryside, do not use exotic species.

Native species have the added benefit of attracting a greater number of insects and therefore providing a plentiful source of food for creatures higher up the food chain. Look for local sources of trees and shrubs. Obtain advice from a conservation organisation before selecting plants for a new hedge, or contact Caring for God's Acre.

Maintaining a new hedge

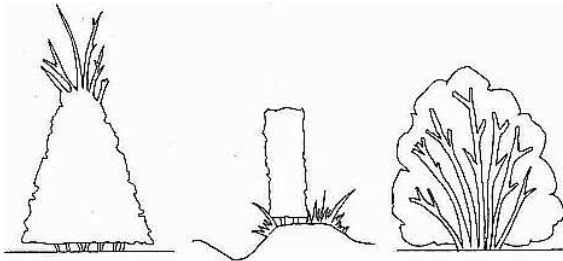
- To have a hedge with a densely wooded lower section, hard prune in the first few years removing at least half the new seasons growth.
- To have a less densely packed lower section that is better for wildflowers, little or no pruning is needed at first

Care of Hedges for Wildlife

Once mature, hedges need little maintenance other than occasional trimming. Follow these tips for a wonderful wildlife hedge:

- The shape of the hedge may be less important to

wildlife than is often claimed so trim into any of the following shapes.



- Cut the hedge every two or three years, January or February. As a general rule the wider and taller the hedge the more wildlife present. Some animals thrive in hedges of at least 4m others prefer shorter – about 2m.
- Leave new shoots of occasional trees to grow - they will become the standards of the future. Mark them with tape so you know they are to be left.
- If you wish to keep the front of the church looking neater than the rear, trim this hedge at regular intervals. Be observant- leave nests alone in this area until the young are fledged. March to August are the busiest months for nesting.
- Hedges should also be laid every 10 -25 years or when laying stem reaches between 5 - 10cm. diameter at the base. Beyond this coppicing may be more suitable.

It is illegal to remove, destroy or damage the nest of any breeding bird when it is being built or used in a hedge.

Rejuvenating an old hedge

- If your hedge has gaps or the plants have grown into trees, you can rejuvenate it rather than creating a new one to increase the wildlife value.
- Either coppice or hard prune the trunks / stems to within 20cm (6-7 inches) of the ground.
- A trained person can lay the hedge for you. Contact your local BTCV for details.
- Add new whips to fill in any gaps and create a greater species diversity.
- Involve any neighbours when planting or managing a hedge - in theory a joint boundary is joint responsibility.

Publications

BTCV guide to hedgerows - a practical handbook

Wildflowers of The British Isles Francis Rose

The Hedgerow regulations 1997 a guide to the law and good practice 1997

Contacts

Hedgeline 0845 600 3078

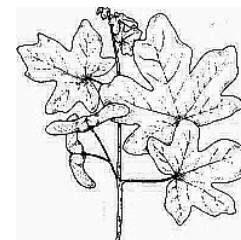
www.hedgeline.org.uk

Produce a free pack with leaflets and a DVD 'A cut above the rest'

Department of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Helpline 0845 933 5577

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV)
Enterprises, Conservation Centre, Balby Road,
Doncaster, DN4 ORH 01302 572200

FWAG Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire
CVS 2RX for local county officers. 02476 696699



Field maple