

7. Caring for Hedgerows



This sheet explains the importance of hedges for wildlife with guidelines on how to manage them and how to plant new hedges.

A hedge between keeps friendships green!

Many old churchyards and burial sites 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. In Worcestershire, for example, you can find abundant wild daffodils.

Well-managed hedges have a higher concentration of wildlife than almost any other British habitat.

Features include:

- Flowers on the trees within the hedge itself providing nectar and berries.
- Thorns to keep predators away from anything nesting.
- A dense structure with abundant leaves providing shelter and roosting sites for birds.
- Grasses and wildflowers at the base giving shelter to many animals including slow worms, mice and voles, particularly if there is long or tussocky grass.
- Hedgerows are essential corridors and flight paths to aid travel from one place to another for birds, bats, small mammals and insects.
- The hedgerow provides safety, warmth and shelter for nesting and over-wintering animals. The hedge base provides a damp, warm place for amphibians such as newts and frogs.



Wayfaring Tree

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:

- Irregular shape, often on a slight bank.
- Old pollarded trees or coppice stools within the hedge.
- A large number of different plant species growing in the hedge.
- A variety of plants and flowers at the base of the hedge such as bluebell and red campion.

Old hedges, which once formed woodland boundaries, may have woodland plants such as yellow archangel, wood anemone and bluebell growing at the base.

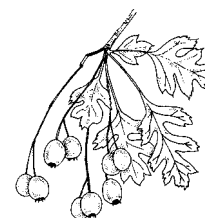
The hedge may pre-date Ordnance Survey maps so look on the Old Maps website (see useful reading).

Some common hedgerow species include

Guelder rose	Dogwood	Field maple
Holly	Wych elm	Hazel
Dog/field rose	Ivy	Hawthorn
Ash	Oak	Blackthorn



Dogwood



Hawthorn

Creating a hedge

Is there an opportunity to plant a new hedge, around an extension of a new burial ground, for example? Look at other natural hedges close to your church and see what species grow well. Hedging whips, which are young plants sized 35 to 90cm, will grow well if planted properly, protected by rabbit guards and then mulched for the first few years.

Native species, such as those in the list above, 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

Staying within the law

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

It is illegal to remove a hedge without planning permission.

If in any doubt, contact your local authority.

Check if a hedge is yours to maintain. Inform any neighbours when planting or managing a hedge.

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local conservation organisation on hedge species and planting distance.

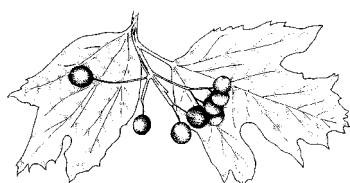
Maintaining a new hedge

- To create a hedge with a densely wooded lower section, hard prune in the first few years removing at least half the new season's growth.
- Dense vegetation at the base of a hedge is crucially important to wildlife. This includes nesting birds, insects, reptiles and small mammals.
- Leave an unmown margin beside the hedge to benefit wildflowers.

Care of hedges for wildlife

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

- The shape of the hedge is not particularly important to wildlife.
- Trim the hedge every two or three years, preferably in January or February. This gives birds and other animals as long as possible to feed on the fruit. Some hedge plants will only flower on 'old wood' i.e. the previous summer's growth. These need at least two years between cuts to flower.
- When planning hedge trimming you may choose to do half the length one year and half the next, or one side one year and the other side the next.
- Leave new shoots of occasional trees to grow; they will become the standards of the future. Mark them



Guelder rose



Hazel

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 and check for nesting birds. Leave nests undisturbed until the young are fledged. March to August are the busiest months for nesting.
- Hedgelaying is another way of managing a hedge. Contact the **Hedgelaying Society** for information.

Rejuvenating an old hedge

- Every hedge needs rejuvenating at some point. If the shrubs that form the hedge structure are developing into a line of trees, if the vegetation at the base of the hedge has thinned out or if gaps have developed in the hedge, it may be time to rejuvenate through coppicing, laying or hard pruning.
- Either coppice or hard prune the trunks and stems to within 20cm (8 inches) of the ground.
- Add new whips to fill in any gaps and to introduce additional tree and shrub species, giving more variety.
- Some hedges can be rejuvenated by hedgelaying. This makes an excellent volunteer task where people can learn (alongside a trainer) how to hedgelay in the regional style.
- Alternatively a trained person can lay the hedge for you. Contact your local **Hedgelaying Society** or **The Conservation Volunteers**.

Useful contacts

Caring for God's Acre, www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

The Conservation Volunteers, www.tcv.org.uk

Local Authority Tree Officer

National Hedgelaying Society, www.hedgelaying.org.uk

The Woodland Trust, www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Useful reading

A Guide to Hedgerows – Field Studies Council fold-out chart

Hedgeline – www.hedgeline.org.uk

Hedging – The Conservation Volunteers handbook