

# FACT SHEET 3

## Hedgerows



**A hedgerow is a linear feature comprising a variety of shrubs and trees. Hedgerows are used to enclose fields, woods, property and to keep livestock within fields. Whilst mainly dominated by tree and shrub species, hedgerows often include interesting ground flora as well. They provide habitat for many wildlife species and create a network of 'corridors' linking habitats such as woods, ponds, grasslands and wetlands. Hedgerows can often be the only refuge for wildlife within the farmed landscape, particularly arable land and as such it is vitally important to look after existing and plant new hedgerows where possible.**

'Ancient hedgerows' generally have the greatest diversity of plants and animals and are defined as those that have been in existence since at least 1845. Some will have been derived from ancient woodlands and others created along parish boundaries.

In Gloucestershire, hedges are particularly important for some species of bat which use them as flight lines to navigate to feeding and roosting sites, but also as feeding areas in their own right. They can also be an important route and habitat for dormice.

Species rich hedgerows, and therefore those which are considered as the best habitat for wildlife, are classified as those with 5 or more woody species in a 30 metre length. Hedgerows with larger trees growing within them are also of high wildlife value, especially in areas where woodland is scarce. Hedges which are less diverse can still be significant in the landscape and could be improved.



### HOW TO MANAGE AN EXISTING HEDGE? \_\_\_\_\_

Most hedgerows in the farmed landscape are cut annually with a tractor mounted flail, which gives the hedge a 'haircut' removing the current years growth.

Cutting hedges by flail is best undertaken in late winter or early spring. If carried out in the autumn the current years fruit and winter food supply for birds and mammals is removed and if done too late in the Spring, nesting habitat for birds is destroyed. If hedges can be cut in an 'A' shape rather than an 'n' shape then the wider base ensures denser growth and a better habitat for wildlife.

There are two traditional methods for managing hedgerows, both with the aim of creating and maintaining a dense, bushy, stock-proof boundary. Perhaps the best known is to 'lay' the hedge. This involves cutting almost all the way through the woody stems and then bending the stem down to be almost parallel with the ground. The hedge then grows new shoots from the cut



area as well as producing lots of dense growth from the horizontal stem.

Alternatively hedges might be coppiced. This involves cutting the hedge plants to within a few inches of the ground and allowing them to re-grow. This promotes vigorous bushy growth.

Either of these techniques can be carried out every 6–7 years to maintain a dense bushy hedge. Hedges should be cut in rotation i.e. a different hedge cut every year to create diversity of habitats for wildlife.

## HOW TO CREATE A NEW HEDGE

The best hedges are those with a good mix of species, it is important to ensure you are using native and where possible local trees and shrubs to create your hedge. Take a look at some local hedges to see what is growing in your area and try to replicate those species which are found nearby.

A typical mix of hedgerow species:

- HAWTHORN
- BLACKTHORN
- HAZEL
- DOG ROSE
- HOLLY
- FIELD MAPLE
- SPINDLE
- GUELDER ROSE



## FURTHER READING

Hedging, a practical handbook Alan Brooks and Elizabeth Agate, BTCV, 2000, ISBN 0946752167.

Natural England advice on Hedgerows: [www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/hedgeregs/default.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/hedgeregs/default.aspx)

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If you are planning a long hedge you should include some plants which will be allowed to grow into hedgerow trees, such as ash, oak and crab apple.

The best way to create a thick hedge is to plant a double row of 6 plants per metre, planted in a zigzag pattern like this:



← 1 metre → ← 1 metre →

Plant the hedge between October and March but not when the ground is frozen or water logged. You will need to keep the new hedge free of other vegetation such as grasses, which will swamp the new trees in the first year or two. Protect the new plants from browsing by rabbits or deer with individual tree guards or spirals. Alternatively if there are livestock using the fields either side of the hedge then it would be essential to fence both sides of the new hedge to protect it from being eaten and trampled. If the first summer is a particularly hot one, you may need to water the hedge, but generally this shouldn't be necessary.

Don't forget to instigate a management system for your hedge. An unmanaged hedge will eventually grow into linear woodland, full of gaps and not good for wildlife or as a stock-proof barrier or property boundary. Coppicing or laying your hedge every 6 or 7 years is ideal.



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