

NEW FOREST HEDGEROWS

Information and guidance for managers of hedges in
and around the south west of Hampshire

Provided by the New Forest Land Advice Service

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New Forest hedgerows

The hedgerows within the New Forest are part of the area's heritage. Many are ancient and species-rich, providing invaluable habitat for wildlife. The character of the farmland is typified by small fields surrounded by hedgerows, with standard trees often growing at intervals along them.

Many hedgerows are cut which helps to keep them thick, however some are cut too often and too short, some at an inappropriate time of year. This means they are not given a chance to get tall and bushy or produce berries and nuts each year as food for wildlife. Many of the hedgerows are no longer in active management and this has led to either rows of mature trees replacing hedgerows or very gappy, thin hedgerows which do not act as either a stock barrier or effective wildlife habitat.

Hedges in good condition are great for wildlife

The history of hedgerows

The word hedge comes from the Ancient English hege or Anglo-Saxon haga and refers to the management of hedgerows for boundary markers, shelter and barriers to keep livestock in and enemies out.

As agriculture developed, the function of hedgerows steered more towards stock barriers. During the 19th century the introduction of barbed wire and the demands for more intensive farming methods left many hedgerows neglected or replaced.

The Hedgerow Regulations (1997)

The recognition of the importance of hedgerows and their decline over the past 50 years, has led to their protection.

The regulations apply to hedgerows that are on or adjoining land used for agricultural, forestry, the breeding or keeping of horses, ponies and donkeys, village greens, common land, SSSIs or Local Nature Reserves and which are:

- 20 metres in length or greater; or
- Meet another hedgerow at each end.

The hedgerow regulations make it illegal to carry out actions which will result in the destruction of a hedgerow. Coppicing, laying and removal of dead and diseased shrubs and trees are treated as normal management.



Three management techniques used to rejuvenate hedgerows include cutting and the traditional skills of coppicing and laying

Planting your own hedgerow

Species Hawthorn, blackthorn, field maple (neutral soils), hazel, holly, guelder rose (neutral soils), hornbeam (damp soils), beech, wild service tree, field rose, dogwood (damp soils), dog rose and spindle (neutral soils).

Tree age The plants should be two year old transplants, 60 to 90 centimetres in height.

Timings Bare root stock can be planted between November and March avoiding times when the ground is frozen or waterlogged.

Dimensions Plant in a staggered double row 30 to 45 centimetres apart, with ideally six plants per metre depending on the local situation.



Newly planted hedgerow with livestock fencing for protection against grazing pressure

Coppicing

For hedge stems too thick to lay

Timings During the winter months between mid-November and early March and outside of the breeding bird season (1 March to 31 August).

Preparation Remove any old fencing materials which could obstruct the cutting equipment.

Process Cut the stems 7.5 centimetres and 15 centimetres from ground level to encourage vigorous re-growth. Angle the cuts so that water can easily run off. Treat elder stumps with herbicide to prevent re-growth, leaving a small number to re-establish for wildlife. Select suitable saplings to leave to develop into hedgerow trees and retain any that exist.

Protection Protective fencing set back 1.2 metres from the centre of the hedge will prevent damage from livestock and other grazing animals.

Disposal Carry out chipping and burning of arising material away from the immediate site if there will be no environmental damage. Placement of small amounts of cuttings over coppice stools will help to deter grazing pressure from rabbits.

Hedges provide bird nesting habitat

Thin, gappy hedges are not so suitable for nesting birds but can be restored and enhanced



Hedge laying

For the complete reconditioning of a hedgerow

Timings Whilst the hedgerow is still dormant between late September and late April and outside of the breeding bird season (1 March to 31 August).

Preparation Remove any old fencing materials which could obstruct the cutting equipment. Bramble, clematis and other scrambling plants should also be removed as they hinder the laying process. Elder should be cut out as its brittle stems do not lay; treat the stumps with herbicide to prevent regrowth, leaving a small number to re-establish for wildlife.

Hedgerows can be restored effectively by following best practice guidance

Process Partially cut stems at ground level, bend the stems down to ground level in the same direction and secure with vertical stakes. Stems with a diameter greater than 25 centimetres are best cut off or left as hedgerow trees. Secure the top of the hedge by binding.

Disposal Carry out chipping and burning of arising material away from the immediate site if there will be no environmental damage.

Protection Protective fencing set back 1.2 metres from the centre of the hedge will prevent damage from livestock and other grazing animals.

Follow up On rotation lightly trim the hedge for two-three years to encourage bushy growth.

New Forest Land Advice Service often runs hedgelaying and other hedgerow management courses. Check the website www.nflandadvice.org.uk for details.





Hedges provide fruit, nuts and nectar for wildlife and people

Top 10 Tips

- 1. Try to keep thick and dense**

This will provide safe nesting and roosting habitat for small bird species.
- 2. Cut at the right time**

Hedgerow berries will provide vital food for birds; cut when they are over, in late winter. Always avoid the breeding bird season (1 March to 31 August) for any management.
- 3. Don't cut too often or too tight**

If cut too repetitively and intensely hedgerows stop producing as many flowers and berries.
- 4. Encourage native shrubs**

Native species provide suitable habitat for much more wildlife than introduced species.
- 5. Encourage flowers and grasses at the base and margins**

Many species such as newts, hedgehogs and bees use this habitat. Leaving an unfertilised/ungrazed grassy margin will greatly increase its value for wildlife. In arable situations consider seeding a three or six metre margin with native wildflower seed.
- 6. Look after trees or plant new ones**

Mature trees will enhance the wildlife diversity within a hedgerow tremendously.
- 7. Rejuvenating your hedge**

Cutting a hedge will encourage new growth from the base, filling gaps and extending the life of the shrubs.
- 8. Protect your hedge**

Livestock and new or regenerating hedges don't mix! Put the fence far enough away so the hedge cannot be browsed.
- 9. Link the hedge with other wildlife habitats and fill in gaps**

This will provide safe passage for many species between habitat features.
- 10. Explore your hedge**

Keep a record of the species you see, and tailor your management to them.

Assess your hedgerow

Positive:

- High shrub species diversity
- Rotational one-sided cutting during February
- Hedge trees
- Habitat connectivity
- Fencing to reduce grazing pressure
- Ground flora and margin

Negative:

- Intense and repetitive cutting
- Single shrub species
- Cutting in early winter
- No hedge trees
- No protection against grazing pressure
- Absence of margin and ground flora

For more information visit www.hedgeline.org.uk

www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/hedgerows

If you are interested in creating or maintaining a hedgerow you can talk to the **New Forest Land Advice Service** for free and independent advice, support and information on any grants which might be available.

Email enquiries@nflandadvice.org.uk or telephone **01590 646696**.

New Forest Land Advice Service

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www.nflandadvice.org.uk



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