

Hedges for Wildlife

How to pick, plant and manage a wildlife-friendly hedge



Why have a plain ugly fence, when a green, living boundary can bring the riches of flowers, scent, berries, rich autumn colours and wildlife?

Yes, a hedge can be all that, and one made out of thorny species will deter uninvited guests too.

Hedges can define property boundaries, break the garden up into rooms, act as a windbreak and can be evergreen or deciduous.

What is more, a thick hedge that is not over-pruned will provide homes and food for many insects

and birds, who will shelter, hibernate and nest in it and feast on the flowers and berries.

Climbers can also add extra thickness and interest. This fact sheet shows you how to create and maintain a wildlife-friendly hedge.



A hedge with ivy growing in it will help wildlife

The benefits of Ivy ... a plant for all seasons

Being evergreen, ivy provides shelter for over-wintering butterflies and insects, as well as shelter for birds escaping bad weather. In spring and summer, birds will nest in it and during autumn, the flowers and berries provide a vital late source of food for many insects and birds. The Holly Blue butterfly will also lay its second batch of eggs on it in autumn.

Planting a hedge

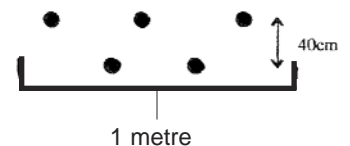
Plant between November and March when the ground is not frozen or covered with snow.

Prepare the site

Dig over your selected site, removing all weeds and roots. Next, mix in plenty of well rotted manure or other organic matter to provide the new hedge with plenty of food. A soil with plenty of organic matter will also hold more moisture and aid drainage. This will help prevent soils becoming waterlogged in winter and will save you having to water the hedge so much in summer. If the soil is heavy clay, add some grit and sand to improve drainage further.

Planting the hedge

To achieve a thick hedge, it is advisable to plant 5 plants per metre, in double staggered rows (see diagram)



Mark out the rows with lines of string and dig a hole for each plant or a trench. Place the plant in the hole (see note on back 'buying plants') ensuring the roots hang straight. The plant should be planted to the same depth as it was in the nursery. A slight change in colour will indicate the level, known as the root collar.



Back fill with soil and gently firm in with the heel of your boot. Water well. If rabbits are present, protect each plant with a tree guard or erect a rabbit proof fence.

Managing a hedge

Watering

Water well regularly during the first summer after planting.

Control weeds

During the first 5 years after planting, remove any weed or grass growth. These will compete for water nutrients and hinder the establishment of the hedge. A layer of mulch will help suppress weeds and reduce the amount of weeding required.

First Prune

In the first spring, cut back the shrubs to 45-60cm above the ground. This will encourage bushy growth resulting in a thicker hedge.

Replace dead plants

Replace any dead plants in autumn to prevent gaps forming in the hedge.

Long-term management for well established hedges

Yew hedges

If it has outgrown its allocated space, prune one side hard back one year and the other side the following year. Never do both sides at the same time as this could kill the hedge.

Deciduous hedges

For a thick hedge, prune each side alternately, every 3 years between November and February. If possible, try to cut sections of hedge at different times, so there is always an undisturbed place for wildlife. To promote a thick base, angle the cut as shown in the diagram.

Laying

If a hedge has been neglected and it has grown tall and gappy, it can be laid. This will extend the life of the hedge and encourage thick growth at the base. For more information on laying, please contact the Trust.

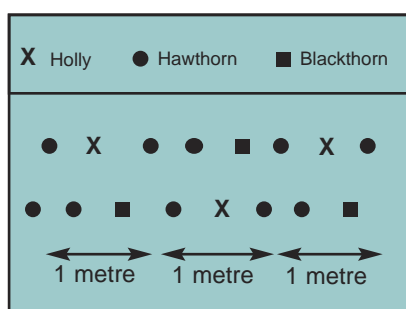
Add climbers

Once a hedge is established, climbers can be introduced to add extra thickness and interest. A thick hedge is better for nesting and provides more shelter and food for wildlife. Climbers to try to include: Honeysuckle, Ivy, Old Man's Beard, White and Black Bryony.

Choosing your plants

The choice of plants is a personal one and depends on the effect you wish to achieve, for example, a thorny, evergreen or deciduous hedge. It is most beneficial to have as many different species in a hedge as you can.

For a mixed native hedge try to include three plants of the same species per metre with one each of two other species.



Native Hedgerow Plants

Evergreen

Holly *
Yew
Juniper

Added Attraction

Berries, butterfly food plant
Berries
Berries

Non-Evergreen

Hawthorn *
Blackthorn *
Hazel
Guelder rose
Dog rose *
Field rose *
Crab apple
Goat willow
Wild cherry
Bird cherry
Spindle

Berries, flowers
Berries, flowers
Nuts
Berries
Hips, flowers
Hips, Flowers
Fruit, flowers
Flowers
Berries, flowers
Berries, flowers
Berries, flowers

Non-native Hedgerow Plants for wildlife

Pyracantha *
Cotoneaster
Lavender
Hebe 'Autumn Glory'

Berries
Berries
Flowers
Flowers

*thorny/spiky



Buying your plants

Hedge plants are normally sold as bare rooted whips (small plants up to 80cm.) These will establish better than large plants provided the roots do not dry out. The roots are very delicate and can be easily killed in no time at all by winds, frost, sun or snow. To prevent this happening, keep the whips in plastic bags up until the very moment they are planted. If the plants arrive before you are ready to plant them, heel them in as quickly as possible (as shown) to safeguard the roots.

