

How To Look After Your Hedgerow

General

Allow hedges to reach and maintain a minimum height of 2m, and minimum width of 0.75m (from the centre of the hedge). In general, the bigger the hedge, the more wildlife it will support. The exception to this is if whitethroat, yellowhammers and partridges live on your site as they prefer shorter hedges.

- Trim hedges between 31st November and 28th February (preferably in January or February) so that birds and animals can eat any fruit and nesting birds are not disturbed.
- Newly laid hedges: Hedgelink recommends that newly laid hedges are trimmed lightly (in winter) for the first 2 years, then cut on rotation. Some gentle weeding of the hedge base by hand can be carried out if required. Make sure the hedge is not shaded by vegetation on either side.
- Trim different aspects of the hedge in rotation, e.g. Year 1: trim top, year 2, no trimming, year 3: trim one side, Year 4: no trimming, Year 5: trim side of the hedge not previously trimmed. Year 6: no trimming. Repeat Years 1-6. Reasons: 1) most trees and shrubs produce flowers & therefore fruit, on year old twigs. 2) some insects only lay their eggs on new growth.
- Each time the top of the hedge is cut, raise the cutting line about 10cms to prevent a hard knuckle of wood forming at the trim line. The development of a trim line leads to mushroom shaped growth with gaps forming at ground level.
- Maintain a buffer zone of at least 1 metre on either side of the hedgerow wherever possible. Where this is not possible, leave at a minimum 0.3metres. Cut the grass here on a high cut in autumn every other year, rotating the area cut so that some long grass remains each winter at the hedge base.

A Few Do's & Don't

- **Don't** cut long grass at hedge bases. It is a very important part of hedgerow habitat and will be home to many invertebrates, e.g. butterfly caterpillars as well as larger animals such as toads, slow worms, shrews, voles and hedgehogs. If absolutely necessary, cut the herb layer adjacent to the hedge every other year in autumn/winter and remove dense cuttings. Leave the herb layer at least 4cm high and do not expose bare soil. Leave some uncut each year to provide shelter for hibernating animals (such as hedgehogs) and over-wintering insects.
- **Don't** use pesticides, fungicides or herbicides at hedge bases. Loss of vegetation at the hedge base severely restricts biodiversity and weakens the hedgerow structure. Natural England stipulate that Farmers receiving Environmental Stewardship payments '*cannot cultivate, spray or fertilise within 2m of the hedge centre line*'.
- **Do** plant any gaps in the hedge with native species of local provenance.
- **Do** protect hedges from grazing animals.

A Few Exceptions

Hedgerows immediately adjacent to paths may need trimming more often than above to keep the path clear of obstruction for pedestrians or cyclists.

Hedgerows along roads may need trimming more frequently than elsewhere to keep sight lines clear.

For more information see Bromley Biodiversity Plan 2015-2020, Appendices E and G at www.bromleyfriendsforum/biodiversity

Additional reading at www.hedgelink.org.uk and www.naturalengland.org.uk