

PLANTING NEW HEDGES

Introduction

The three main purposes of hedges are controlling stock, marking boundaries and providing shelter. However, with good management they can also have great benefits for wildlife by providing food, shelter and nesting sites.

Selecting species

Use locally native species such as blackthorn, hazel, holly and field maple and try to provide a wide variety of flowers, berries and leaves for wildlife.

Take advice on which will suit your soil type and look around the new site to see what species are commonly found in the area.

Trees

Consider planting a proportion of tree species (one tree every 20-50m), most native trees found locally are suitable. Avoid non-native trees or those casting heavy shade e.g. horse chestnut, sycamore and beech.

Consider using tubes and/or stakes to mark where the trees

are and protect them from the hedge trimmer.

Size of hedge plants

The hedge plants will vary in size depending on age and species. Two year old transplants are cheaper, and establish quickly if looked after well. Three year olds will be more expensive to buy but will stand weed competition better.

All plants need a good root system, which must be protected from drying out between lifting from the nursery and planting out. If necessary they should be heeled into temporary trenches whilst awaiting planting.

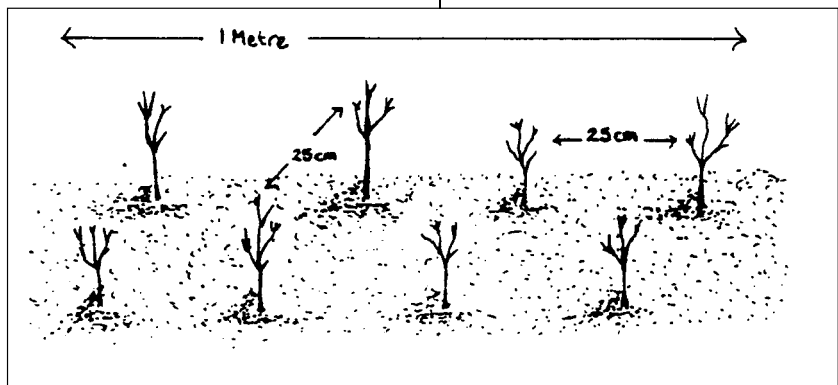


The suggested rate is 6 plants per metre planted in a double staggered row with 33cm (13") between plants and 25cm (10") between rows. (However to qualify for some grants, other

Planting densities may be required.)

The suggested ratio is 70-95% thorny species, e.g. hawthorn, blackthorn and holly, 5-30% other species. This will not reduce the stock proofing properties of the hedge and will provide variety for wildlife.

Plant between October and March, ideally before the end of December.



Planting

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species. Hawthorn is not very shade tolerant so consider planting other species such as blackthorn and holly under the shade of hedgerow trees to avoid gaps developing.

The hedge plants can be planted into 'L' or 'T' shaped notches cut with a spade. On poor ground, however, cultivate and incorporate a little well rotted manure to help establishment. Cultivation should be to a depth of about 30cm (12"), 60cm (2ft) wide. The plants should be planted to the same depth as they were in the nursery.

Weeding

To ensure a high plant survival level, the new hedge should be kept as weed free as possible for the first 3 years, with a pre-planting treatment to clear perennial weeds and, more importantly, post planting treatments. Various techniques are available:-

- Well rotted manure, wood chip, mushroom compost, wedges of baled straw or grass cuttings can be used as mulch. To be successful it needs to be applied fairly thickly at a minimum depth of 10cm (4").
- Black plastic (old silage sheet) can also be used as a mulch. The hedge can be notch planted through the plastic which has been previously secured by slotting it into the surrounding turf. Alternatively the hedge can be planted into clear ground

as normal, then pruned back to about 7.5 - 10cm (3-4") above ground and the black plastic laid over the top, with pruned hedge stems pushed through.

- Herbicides can be a quick and cheap method of weed control, but the selection and application of the treatment is critical and advice should be taken. Any herbicide must be used only in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and current legislation.
- Establishing a non competitive grass sward prior to hedge planting can make weed control unnecessary. The hedge would then be notch planted into the established sward (rather than pit or trench planting). Some rabbit protection can also be achieved by this method as grass disguises the hedge plants from rabbits and hares. However, weed competition may lead to some losses, particularly in adverse weather conditions. It may also suppress the overall growth rate for the first few years.

Protective Fencing

Fencing must be erected at a distance great enough to prevent stock from browsing the tops off the hedge plants and wide enough to allow a 2m wide mature hedge to develop with a 1m grass base either side.

Where rabbits are a problem, protection will be needed. For longer sections, rabbit wire will probably be most economical.

Individual rabbit spirals may be used but can be difficult to attach to and remove from bushy hedging plants and can pull the hedge plant over in exposed areas. Small protective tubes are now available which are cheap, easy to use, more stable and in some cases re-usable.

Early management

If the hedge is to be laid the plants need only be sided up with the trimmer until the leaders have reached a suitable height - 2.4-3.6m (8-12ft). If the hedge is not to be laid, careful trimming in the first year will encourage early branching for dense growth at the base of the hedge. The hedge could be laid at a future date if necessary.

Further Information

For details of your local FWAG Group, please contact FWAG at the National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, CV8 2RX.

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