

Hedgerows

Why hedge trees and hedgerows matter

Hedgerows are an undervalued resource that are in danger of being lost from our towns and cities. They are important for biodiversity and provide a range of benefits to people. In the past, hedges were used as larders of healthy seasonal food – apples, berries and nuts were collected as a healthy tasty supplement to the diet. They also provided fire wood and were a source of animal feed. Today, we need them as wildlife corridors and because of the large numbers of animals from song birds to pollinating insects that they support.

Improving urban edges

Existing urban hedges are often clipped, sterile habitats. By changing peoples' perception of what a hedge should be, from a neat 'box' to a more natural and 'wild' hedge, we can improve many urban edges for both biodiversity and for food. The Tree Council is chair of [Hedgeline](#), a coalition of organisations passionate about Britain's hedgerows. We also created the [Hedgerow Harvest oral history project](#) which contains more information and guidance on how to protect and use your local hedgerows.

Download guidance: <https://treecouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/hedge-planting.pdf>

Planting hedgerows

There are no real do's or don'ts of hedge planting – be as experimental as you like, but follow a few basic guidelines:

What and how to plant

- Plant vigorous plants like blackthorn, plum and hawthorn towards the back of your hedge. Try growing things that scramble like vines, blackberries, wild roses and raspberry canes through this and plant fruit bushes like currants and gooseberries to the front or on the south facing side.
- Plan to plant your hedge in the winter when plants are dormant, this means they will have time to settle in and put down roots before they come into leaf in the spring.
- Plant in staggered rows with plants about 30cm apart and think about the space you have available – your hedge can be as long as you like and anything from 60cm to 2 meters wide depending on how many rows of hedging plants you plant, but remember if you want to pick the fruit you need to make it accessible.
- Use spiral guards or protect the hedge with netting if you are planting in an area with rabbits or other animals that are likely to chew the bark or eat the young plants.
- You can also plant fruit trees in your hedge – try apples, pears and cherries as well as nuts like hazel, walnut and almond.

Aftercare

- Once you have planted your hedge it will need a little looking after, particularly in its first couple of years.
- Mulch around the base of the hedge with wood chip to keep down weeds that compete for water and water in dry spells particularly in the spring and early summer in the first year.
- Remove any guards or netting after a few years when the hedge has established and let the bottom of the hedge fill with weeds and wild flowers that are also great for wildlife.

Pruning and trimming

- If the backbone of your hedge is made up of woody shrubs like blackthorn, mirabelle and hawthorn, these will need to be cut back in the autumn or winter when the hedge is dormant and when there is no risk of disturbing wildlife.
- To maximise fruit production and wildlife value and create a truly wild hedge – cut the hedge back on a 2 to 4 year cycle rather than trim every year

