Guidelines for hedge planting

Care of plants

Ideally, hedge plants should be planted out as soon as possible after delivery or should be 'heeled in' if they are not to be planted immediately. This involves placing the roots in a pit or trench and covering with firmed soil to prevent them drying out, being damaged by frost or exposure to sunlight.

When planting it is important to keep the plants in a plastic bag to prevent drying out and exposure to light. It is essential that the roots are kept moist and dark as even a short period of exposure could damage the plants.

Hedge plants should be 40-60cm transplants of locally common native species and of British provenance (preferably local) and should comply to British Standard 3936.

Species choice

The most environmentally beneficial hedge will be one comprised of a range of locally native species of local provenance. The stockproof nature of such a mixed species hedgerow need not be compromised, as long as at least 75% of the species mix is composed of thorny species, i.e. Hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna) and Blackthorn (Prunus spinosa).

A list is available of tree and shrub species locally native to the White Peak and Dark Peak and which may be appropriate for planting in Peak District hedgerows. National Park Conservation Service staff will advise on the most appropriate mix of species for a particular site.

Where a selection of these additional species are incorporated into the hedge it should be in groups of 3-5 plants (across both rows of the hedge for a double row hedge).

Planting

Planting should be carried out between November and March. Autumn planting is preferable as it usually results in better establishment although there is an increased danger of damage by rabbits and hares during the winter months. No planting should be done in very wet, frosty or snowy conditions.

Establishment of new plants in an old hedge is often difficult as the site is usually dry and leached of nutrients. It is essential to ‘improve’ the soil in such circumstances by digging in well-rotted farmyard manure. When gapping-up an existing hedgerow adjacent plants can be trimmed back or coppiced, promoting more successful establishment of new plants due to increased light levels. Alternatively shade tolerant species, such as Blackthorn or Holly, could be planted next to established shrubs.

The normal method is to plant new hedges without constructing a bank but when replanting an old hedgeline the planting should follow the top of the bank, if present. The species of trees and shrubs planted should match those in surviving sections of the hedge or in adjoining hedges. If possible the new hedge should follow the former hedge line where one existed and can be identified; otherwise it should be in accord with the hedgerow pattern of the immediate area.

Planting can be carried out in two main ways:

(i) **Cultivated strip planting**
In a cultivated strip, approximately 60cm wide by 25cm deep. This ensures that the roots of each plant are placed into the optimum cultivated conditions for good root development.

(ii) **Slit planting**
By cutting a slit in the ground and holding it open with a spade whilst the roots of the plant are carefully inserted and spread downwards.

The plants should be set in at the same depth as they were in the nursery and the soil must be firmed well in around the roots.

A suitable herbicide applied before planting (when vegetation is actively growing) will help to control weed growth (see Weeding within these guidelines). **Note: all herbicides must be applied in accordance with the label recommendations.** The use of herbicides may not be appropriate in the vicinity of wetlands and watercourses.

A double staggered row of plants produces a dense, solid hedge with suitable stems for laying. This method uses 6 plants per metre, in two rows about 25cm apart with plants at approximately 45cm in each row.

Wide hedgerows may be established where space is available and have the benefit of creating wider landscape and conservation corridors. The normal method would be to plant a double row hedge as above, with a distance between the rows of 1-1.5m, and to plant a varied row of trees between these rows.

Damaged or dead shoots should be removed at planting.

Trees

Hedgerow trees increase the landscape and wildlife value of a hedge. Trees should be planted in tree shelters for protection and increased visibility so they can be easily avoided during hedge trimming. 60-90cm whips should be used at irregular planting distances of 20-50m, particularly at junctions with other hedgerows. Oak and Ash are the most appropriate species, dependent on the site (see 'Guidelines for tree planting'). Other species may be suitable in certain locations, whilst in some situations, for example where breeding waders are present on adjacent land, planting additional hedgerow trees may not be appropriate. Conservation Service staff will be able to offer further advice.

Hedge guards

Hedge guards are used to protect plants from rabbits, particularly where there are dense populations, and may be used where rabbit netting is impractical or inappropriate, for example where the netting would restrict the passage of wildlife significantly.

It is important to establish the hedge guards firmly in the ground by the use of a stake or cane as they are otherwise liable to blow over in strong winds. Guards will need to be checked periodically to ensure that they have not fallen over.

Fencing

Protective fencing will be required to protect the new growth from livestock and, where appropriate, rabbits and hares. There should be a minimum of 1m left on either side of the planting (see 'Guidelines for stock proof fencing'). Where the adjacent land is grazed only by cattle a line of barbed wire at least 1m either side of the planting will allow cattle to graze up to, but not in the hedge.

Weeding

The control of weeds during the first three years after planting is essential to ensure good growth and survival of hedge plants. Weeds, in particular rank grass, can choke the hedge depriving it of light, nutrients and moisture.

Various methods available to control weeds and ensure good hedge establishment are outlined below.

(i) Mechanical weeding

This is a relatively inefficient method and has little impact on grass competition for moisture. Indeed using only mechanical weeding methods can actually increase the vigour of grasses. However, these methods can often be beneficial when used in conjunction with other methods of weed control.

a) Hand weeding

Weeding by hand is sometimes the only option on hedges close to open watercourses or in situations where other methods of weed control may damage the hedge plants. This can be done at any time of year but will be most beneficial from May onwards when the weeds begin to take a strong hold and compete with the hedge plants. Hand weeding may be required before other methods of control can be carried out if the weeds are very rank and the hedge plants are not clearly visible. This method can be very time consuming and may need to be repeated a number of times during the growing season.

b) Strimming

This method can be useful where the hedge plants are clearly visible or protected by guards. Strimming can be a relatively quick method of weed control but as with hand weeding it needs repeating to be effective. Care must be taken not to damage the growing hedge plants whilst strimming. Protective clothing should be worn by the operator.

(ii) Mulches

Mulches of organic materials, such as wood chippings, straw or well-rotted farmyard manure, can be used to both retain moisture and suppress weed growth. Black polythene sheeting can also be used as a mat for continued weed control, always ensuring that the ground is moist before laying. Mulches are laid after planting and are especially effective for hedges planted on dry bank tops.

(iii) Chemicals

There is a range of legal requirements that apply to the use and storage of pesticides. All users are required to take all reasonable precautions to protect the health of people, animals and plants, to safeguard the environment and in particular to avoid pollution of water. There is a range of chemical treatments available for use on hedges – the following are two widely used and relatively safe examples. Chemical users should have a Certificate of Competence and be

familiar with the relevant COSHH regulations. Protective clothing should be worn by the operator and label instructions must be read and strictly adhered to.

a) Propyzamide (e.g. Kerb granules)

Propyzamide is a residual soil acting weedkiller for the control of certain grasses and broadleaved weeds. It is not recommended during the first season after planting as this may lead to root damage. Propyzamide should not be used near open watercourses as it can be harmful to aquatic life. The action of the chemical will be reduced if the weather remains dry after use and ideal conditions are moist, cold soils but the chemical should not be applied on top of snow or in hard frosts. Application should be carried out between October and February, but ideally before the end of January. A certain amount of manual or mechanical weeding may be required before application since large amounts of organic litter can reduce the action of the chemical. Propyzamide granules are supplied in shakers and so application is simple and can be very accurate with practice. One shaker pack should treat approximately 100m of hedge.

b) Glyphosate (e.g. Roundup)

Glyphosate is a contact acting chemical and should be used with extreme caution on new hedges. Glyphosate is only effective when applied directly to actively growing weeds (April – October). It will also damage or even kill the hedge plants if they come into direct contact with the chemical so a spray shield is essential to protect from drift. Glyphosate is very effective for clearing the ground of weeds prior to hedge planting and for spot treatment of weeds around the hedge.

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Further advice on the use of pesticides can be sought from a BASIS (British Agrochemical Supply Industry Scheme) Adviser. The sections on chemical use within these guidelines have been developed in consultation with a BASIS registered adviser.

Aftercare

In the first planting season after planting, losses should be replaced.

Once the young hedgerow is established and growing unimpeded by weeds it can be trimmed, taking off only a few inches of growth to encourage the stems to branch out the following season. Continuing this practice will result in a dense, bushy hedgerow of great value to wildlife. The hedgerow can subsequently be trimmed on a 2-3 year rotation (see Hedgerow management under 'Guidelines for regenerating derelict hedgerows'). Hedge guards can be removed from the plants once they have grown beyond the reach of browsing rabbits, and this will encourage side growth.

Alternatively allow the hedgerow to grow straight up, just trimming the sides for 7-10 years, by which time it should have reached around 2 metres. The young hedgerow can then be laid while the stems are still young and flexible (see 'Guidelines for regenerating derelict hedgerows').