

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Hedgerow Management

Hedgerows form an important and attractive part of the countryside. They also provide a very important habitat for a wide range of species and often link together different areas of habitat. Bats, birds and butterflies all use hedges as corridors for flight. They are a good source of food, providing berries for birds and nectar sources for butterflies and insects. Birds also use hedges to nest in and hedgerow trees as song posts. Hedgerows also provide a home for a range of small mammals.

Important Biodiversity Action Plan species that benefit from well-managed hedges include; song thrush, tree sparrow, linnets, bats, butterflies and dormice.

How to manage hedgerows to benefit wildlife

Most important – all hedgerows are different and each requires its own management approach.

Aim to create variation in the hedge size, shape and varieties across the farm as a whole. Different types of hedge habitat will favour different species and increase the diversity of wildlife on the farm. As a general rule the larger a hedge is the more wildlife it is able to support. A full hedge management plan will help to ensure variation in hedge types and styles.

- Aim to cut hedges every other year, or preferably every third year with slow growing thorn hedges. Try to avoid trimming all hedges in the same year. Ideally cut no more than a third of the hedges in any year.
- If cutting must be carried out annually, cut the hedge at a higher level than the previous year, allowing the hedge to grow taller.



An un-trimmed hedge junction – excellent for birds and bats



Fenced hedge with grassy margins – a good wildlife corridor

- Gap up with local provenance stock of mixed species.
- Fence livestock away from a hedge by at least one metre and leave at least one metre of uncultivated or ungrazed land between the hedge and the crop.
- For all hedges and especially those of particular wildlife importance consider adopting set-aside headlands or grass buffer strips.
- Leave some hawthorns as 'standards,' they provide flowers (pollen and nectar) and berries for wild animals at no cost.
- Hedge junctions can be particularly beneficial to wildlife. Allow field corner hedges to grow un-trimmed (or trim very occasionally) to provide an alternative habitat.

Some farm practices to help conservation

- Over-management, or trimming the hedge too severely can have a detrimental effect. In general a taller, bushier hedge will provide more wildlife potential than a smaller, thinner hedge.
- Avoid trimming hedges at the wrong time of year i.e. when birds are nesting, or whilst fruit is still available.
- Never cut between April and the end of August. Ideally cut in January and February, after most of the berries have been eaten.
- If conditions dictate that trimming must occur whilst berries are still on the hedge, trim only the sides, or even alternate sides as this will leave some fruit remaining at all times.
- Avoid spray and fertiliser drift into hedges, hedge verges and hedge bottoms – **save money**.
- Avoid cultivating close to the hedge reducing root damage, soil compaction and higher inputs.
- Allowing stock access to a hedge will often reduce the wildlife potential through browsing, over-grazing of hedge bottoms and nutrient enrichment from dung.



Hedge trimmed along the sides, leaving berries and nectar sources available on top

Environmental Stewardship Opportunities

Hedgerow management can contribute significantly to Defra's new Environmental Stewardship Schemes. Points for ELS (Entry Level Stewardship) are available for general hedgerow management, which (amongst other criteria) involves cutting the hedge no more than once every two years, to a minimum height of 1.5 metres. This will earn you 11 points per 100 metres for one side of the hedge and 22 points for both. The enhanced management option offers 42 points per 100 metres for both sides of the hedge and includes maintaining a minimum height of 2 metres and cutting every three years.

For further information see the Entry Level Stewardship Handbook
www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/schemes/els/default.htm

Relevant legislation

Under the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) requirements for Cross Compliance a 2-metre buffer strip (no cultivation, fertilisers, manures or pesticides) is needed alongside hedges in fields larger than 2 hectares. The 2 metre buffer strip is measured from the centre of the hedge. You must also comply with the Hedgerow Regulations 1997 and not cut any hedge between March 1st and July 31st unless for reasons of public safety. For further details refer to the Defra Cross Compliance Handbook for England 2005 or see www.crosscompliance.org.uk

Further Information

For further information including possible grant aid contact your local FWAG Adviser and see the farmland biodiversity, environmentally responsible farming and virtual farm walk areas on the FWAG website: www.fwag.org.uk