

Hedge Planting

Guidance Notes

**Hertfordshire
Countryside Management
Service**

For further information on this or any matter concerned with countryside conservation contact your local CMS office.

Northeastern Area

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www.hertsdirect.gov.uk/cms

Planting a new hedge is a long term commitment and should be considered carefully. This leaflet aims to outline the main points that will ensure success.

Site Preparation

To aid establishment the site should be prepared prior to planting. Plough, rotovate or dig a strip 60cm wide by 30cm deep and create a weed free strip about 1m wide, either by cultivation or herbicide.

Plant Selection

Bare root transplants of 30cm to 60cm should be used, of a species mix which matches surrounding hedges. For further advice on suitable species contact your local CMS officer.

As a basic guide the species mix should be predominantly hawthorn. You may use blackthorn but be aware that it suckers vigorously and you may therefore wish to leave it out.

To this a small proportion of shrubs indicative of the local area could be included, but when doing this avoid regular spacing as this may create a striped unnatural effect.

Planting Out

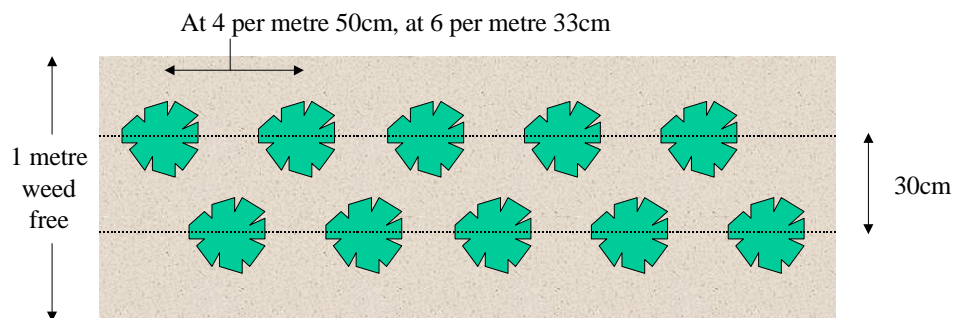
Plant as soon as possible after obtaining the plants. All roots should be protected while exposed to prevent drying out or frost damage. This includes during planting out when a slight breeze can soon dry the roots.

Plant during the Winter, or ideally late Autumn or early Spring to avoid heavy frosts, but while the soil is moist.

If the ground is very soft or has been cultivated then slot planting maybe an option otherwise pit planting is better.

The plants should be spaced in a staggered double row with 4 to 6 plants per metre.

Planting Layout



Protection

Wild animals such as rabbits, voles or deer can decimate a newly planted hedge so protection of new plants is essential. Individual guards are generally the easiest way though fencing maybe an option.

Types of Guards

Spiral guards – These expand with the growing plant and protect from browsing animals. Clear guards are generally preferable.

Plastic mesh guards – These can be used where branching is a problem such as with holly.

Tree shelters– While protecting the plant these also aid the trees early development by providing a sheltered environment, but will restrict lateral growth.

Guards should be removed once the plants are well established, say in 3 to 5 years, though caution may be needed where large numbers of rabbits are present.

Domestic Animals

Cattle, sheep and horses may all browse and damage new hedge plants. If they are present then a fence will be required. This should be at least 1m from the hedge and ideally 2m to allow maintenance and prevention of browsing.

Weed Problems

This is perhaps the most important operation when establishing a new hedge and is often over looked. The main way in which weeds harm new trees is by competing for water and nutrients from the soil. Certain weeds can also smother new plants depriving them of light.

Weed competition not only reduces the survival rate of a new planting, it also dramatically reduces their subsequent growth rate. This can mean the difference

between a first year growth rate of 30-40cm and a first year growth rate of just 1-2cm. In extreme cases plants may even experience first year die back. This is more common where standard sized trees are planted.

Weed Control

To prevent weed competition an area 1 metre across should be cleared of vegetation in line with the new hedge. This will require maintenance for the first three years or until the plants become established.

A variety of methods can be used to control weeds as detailed:

Cutting – This will help to control some plants such as nettles and brambles, but will invigorate many others such as grasses and rosette forming herbs, stimulating greater root growth and competition. Where these weeds predominate cutting will be counter productive.

Hoeing – Can be effective but is labour intensive, and great care will be needed around newly established plants in order to not excessively disturb their roots or damage the bark.

Herbicide – This is cheaper than most alternatives, but requires specialist knowledge and equipment. Advice can only be given by a suitably qualified practitioner.

Mulch mats – These are effective but may occasionally harbour small mammals and invertebrate pests.

Organic mulch – An environmental alternative which suppresses weeds before rotting into the soil. The following can be used: wood chips, bark, coconut fibre, grass cuttings, well rotted horse manure or farm yard manure.

A layer about 4” deep will be required to be effective. Some light weeding and topping up of the layer will be needed in following years.

Losses

If all the precautions listed on this sheet are followed then losses should be minimal, however during extreme weather losses maybe unavoidable and should be replaced the following year.

Hedge Profiles

An early trim at the end of the first growing season will help to produce a thicker hedge. After this the aim should be to produce a hedge 2 metres tall by about 1.5 metres wide, with an A-shaped profile. If a more vertical profile is needed then chamfered top corners will help to produce a similar effect.

Hedgerow Trees

If hedgerow trees are to be included these should be spaced at least 30m apart to prevent them overshadowing the hedge. To establish trees, they can be planted in the line of the new hedge along with the hedge plants, but use tree shelters to allow their identification during maintenance.

Planting Checklist

- ✓ Ground preparation
- ✓ Plant selection and species
- ✓ Time of year
- ✓ Pest protection
- ✓ Weed control

