

# Hedge Laying & Coppicing



**1** Before hedge laying, a hedge should be at least 2 metres (6'6") in height, with a stem width of 50–100mm (2–4") at the base.



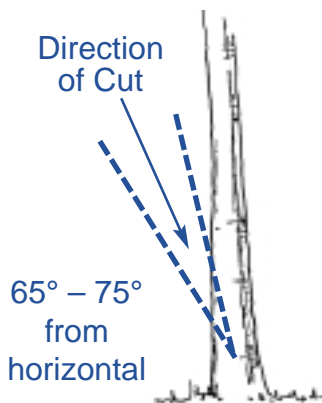
Hedge before laying



Siding up

**2** Clean the base of the hedge out and remove any old fencing. Trim back the side growth to allow easy access to the base of the stems. Ensure the individual stems are disentangled from one another.

**3** Cut the stems between the angles shown to  $\frac{2}{3}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$  of the stem width. For stems 50–100mm (2–4") wide, start the cut 100–150mm (4–6") above ground. Thicker stems will require cutting from a higher point.



Cutting



Using a hook to lever a pleacher over

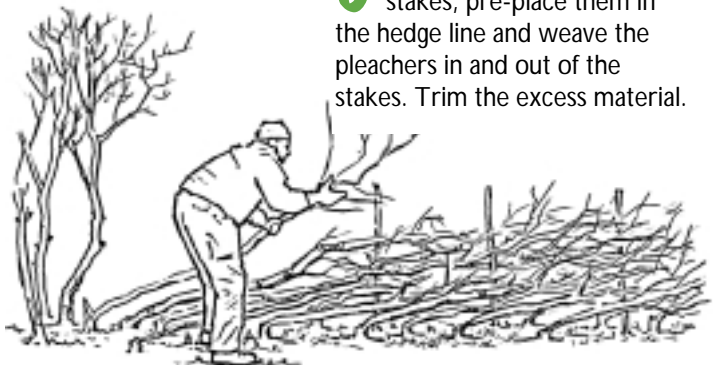
**4** Using the billhook or axe as a lever, open a split down the stem to 50mm (2") above ground level. At the same time, support the stem (cut stems are referred to as pleachers) with the free hand.



Taking a pleacher down to the hedge line

**5** When the pleacher feels as if it will lay over under its own weight, bring it down into the hedge line. The stem should bend in a curve from just above ground level.

**6** If building the hedge around stakes, pre-place them in the hedge line and weave the pleachers in and out of the stakes. Trim the excess material.



Weaving a pleacher around the stakes

**7** Trim the stubs off at the base, angling them away from the split. This minimises the chance of rot and ensures re-growth comes from the base.



Trimming the stub



Finished work

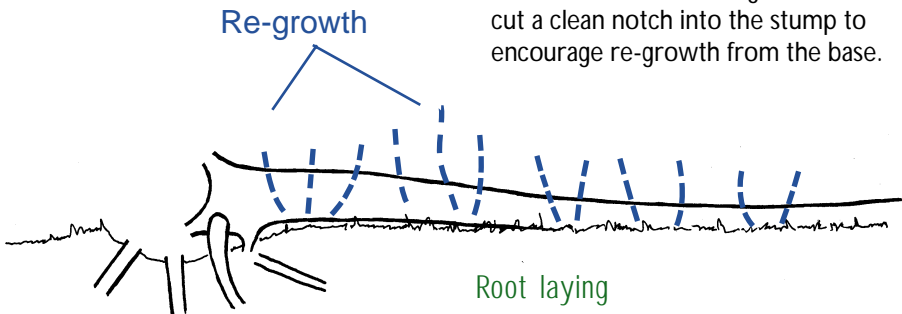
**8** The finished hedge should be full at the base, the stumps cleaned and all material woven into the hedge or trimmed off.

## Special Circumstances



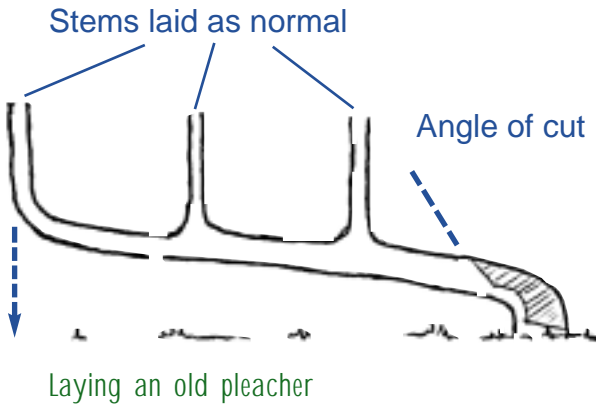
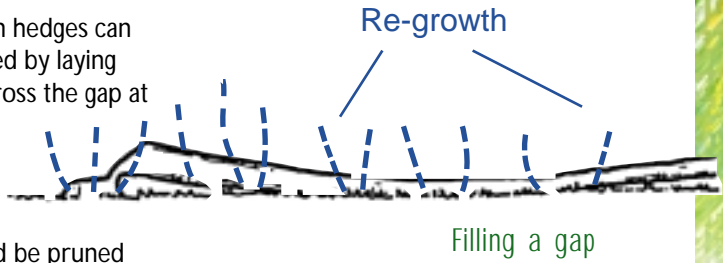
laid high

**9** Where a stem cannot be laid sufficiently low from the base, e.g. where it is growing from an old or multi-stemmed stump, lay the stem as normal but after cleaning the stub off, cut a clean notch into the stump to encourage re-growth from the base.



**10** Large stems that are too brittle or difficult to lay conventionally can be dealt with by exposing the root system. This can be done by severing the roots at the front and the back of the stem (relative to the direction of laying). The base and side roots can be removed as required until the plant can be manoeuvred into the desired position. Once down, the stumps should be cleaned and soil heaped over any exposed roots.

**11** Small gaps in hedges can often be filled by laying existing plants across the gap at ground level. Any excess brush holding the main stem off the ground should be pruned off. The stem can be pinned down if necessary. New growth will regenerate from the stem to fill the gap.



**12** Relaying old stems. Old stems can usually be retained when relaying a hedge. Where the old stem has risen over time it can be re-laid as shown to ensure there are no gaps in the hedge bottom, with the new stems being laid as normal.



**13** Coppicing. Where plants are considered too large, brittle or distorted in their growth form (e.g. due to long term repeated trimming) it may be more appropriate to coppice. This involves felling the plant to leave a stump between 50-100mm (2-4") high with a sloping top to shed water off the cut surface to minimise the chances of rot.

## Styles of Hedgelaying



Top view of  
Typical pleacher

**14** Single brushing. The pleachers are laid slightly to one side of the hedge line. The stems are interwoven around the stakes to provide structural strength. Single brushing is typically seen in 'Midlands' style hedges and often laid



relatively high. It is also commonly finished with hazel rods wrapped around the tops of the stakes as binding.

Top view of  
Single Brush

**15** Double brushing. The pleachers are alternately laid out either side of the hedge line and the stumps are covered by brush. Double brushing forms a very dense wide hedge of varying height. This particular style is used in Wales to control sheep.



Top view of  
Double Brush



Laid Over

**16** Laid over. Plants are laid over straight down the centre of the hedge and the stumps are covered by brush. Hedges laid this way are relatively low but very dense. This style is typically seen in the north of England where sheep are present and may or may not feature stakes.

## Key Points list

- Hedgelaying and coppicing should usually be undertaken between the end of October and the end of March, avoiding frosty weather. For wildlife it is best to leave the hedge until all the berries have been taken.
- For old hedges, coppicing and laying is best undertaken early spring (March). The large stems are less brittle as the sap rises.
- Cuts should be made on the opposite side of the stem to the direction the hedge is laid. Avoid splitting the stem below ground level.
- Always ensure the tip of a pleacher finishes higher than the base. Hedges should normally be laid uphill.
- Coppiced hedges and the base of pleachers require protection from stock.
- Always wear appropriate protective clothing. If using a chainsaw, be aware of the danger of hidden wire and nails.

### Useful References

1. Hedge Laying and Coppicing, Field Boundaries Technical Advice Sheet No.1: Durham County Council. Tel: 0191 383 4078
2. Hedging - a practical handbook. British Trust for Conservation Volunteers: Alan Brook & Elizabeth Agate. Tel: 01302 859 522.
3. National Hedge Laying Society booklet. Consult the website for details. <http://members.lycos.co.uk/hedgelaying>

### Useful contacts

1. Durham County Council, Hedgerow Project Officer, for advice on grants, good practice and training. Tel: 0191 383 4078.
2. Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group for advice on good practice and grants. Tel: 01833 630 880.
3. Rural Development Service, NE Region, DEFRA for advice on grants. Tel: 0191 229 5500.
4. LANTRA (ex- Agricultural Training Board) for advice on training. Tel: 0247 669 6996
5. BTCV Enterprises can supply tools and handbooks. Tel: 01302 859 522.
6. The National Hedgelaying Society offers advice on hedgerow management, conservation, competitions and courses. Consult the website for contact details: <http://members.lycos.co.uk/hedgelaying> .

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