

Trimming is the commonest form of hedgerow maintenance. When undertaken correctly, trimming is an efficient form of management. However excessive trimming has been linked with hedgerow dieback and annual trimming greatly reduces the availability of food resources for wildlife. To ensure the continued health of hedgerows and to enhance their wildlife value it is recommended that trimming is undertaken in accordance with the following guidelines.

- 1** Where possible, avoid trimming annually. Trimming every two or three years can be cheaper and is better for the long term health of the hedge.

There is often no good reason for annual cutting other than 'tidiness'. Most hedgerow plants fruit and flower more freely on two or three year old wood. Cutting more frequently than this greatly restricts the availability of food resources for wildlife and has been linked to hedgerow decline.

- 2** Where a hedge has to be trimmed annually, consider whether the whole hedge needs trimming or whether the top or one or more sides can be cut less frequently.

For example, a roadside hedge is likely to require annual trimming, however the field side and possibly the top could be managed every other year.

- 3** Never cut hedgerows during the nesting season (March to August). Late winter, avoiding periods of very hard frost, are the best months for hedge trimming.

All wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law. You are liable to contravene the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) if you cut during the bird nesting season. Farmers participating in agri-environment schemes or in receipt of Less Favoured Area payments are not permitted to trim hedges between 1st March and 31st July. Delay cutting until late winter (January & February) to leave fruit and nuts for wildlife. If it is not possible to get on the field at this time of year, trimming can be brought forward to early winter.



4 Plan hedgerow management on a farm on a rotational basis. Talk to F.W.A.G. about farm management plans.

Cutting all the hedges on a holding at once will have a significant impact on food resources for wildlife across the farm. Aim to have hedgerows at a variety of growth stages on the farm. If cutting biennially, only half of the hedges should be trimmed every year.

5 Leave some saplings to grow into hedgerow trees.

Hedgerow trees provide shelter and shade for stock. They also are an important component of the landscape and can have considerable wildlife value. Allow at least 20m between each sapling so as not to shade out the hedge.

6 Ensure your machinery is in good order and that the cutting edges are kept sharp.

This allows for more efficient progress whilst producing a better finish.

7 Before commencing trimming, check the hedge for lengths of stray fencing wire.

Old wires catching in a fast moving flail head can be fatal.

8 If a hedge has been laid, make sure you cut above the height of any stakes and that you do not catch the laid stems. Trimming should be undertaken in the direction of lay.

Catching the laid stems or stakes will undo the hedgers work.

9 When trimming, start at the top of the hedge and work downwards.

As cut material falls it will be further chopped and mulched

10 On strong growth use a shape saw or consider an alternative management approach i.e. hedgelaying or coppicing.

Most flail trimmers are only designed to cut growth up to about 2cm ($\frac{3}{4}$ ") thickness. When used on thicker stems, the result can look terrible resulting in split and ragged stems. Most healthy hedgerows can recover, but are vulnerable to attack by fungal disease particularly if the flail is used annually. Heavy duty flails are available which can cut material upto 10cm (4"). A circular saw should be used where thicker growth needs to be cut.

11**Aim to produce a variety of hedge sizes on the farm.**

A variety of hedge sizes across the farm is likely to yield the greatest benefits to biodiversity. Hedges on a north-south alignment, adjacent to tracks or at field corners can be allowed to grow taller without causing significant shading problems. Dense hedges at least 2m (6'6") tall will attract the greatest variety of birds. For advice on management for specific species contact the groups mentioned overleaf.

12**The shape to which a hedge is cut is of less importance to wildlife than the size at which it is maintained, however, there are advantages to cutting hedges with sloping sides.**

Hedges cut into an A, flat topped A or cut with a chamfered top are able to shed heavy snow falls. These are less likely to be damaged than parallel sided hedges. They also allow more light to reach the lower sections of the hedge helping to keep the base dense.

13**When a hedge gets gappy or thin at the base allow it to grow on to be laid. In extreme cases, consider coppicing (see Field Boundaries Technical Advice Sheet 1).**

All hedges will eventually require laying or coppicing in order to ensure their long term survival. Long term maintenance by trimming alone will result in the gradual disappearance of the hedge as the plants start to die off.

14**Plant any gaps in the hedge with native species using shrubs such as blackthorn, and holly with the occasional crab apple and hazel.**

This provides alternative food sources for wildlife. Holly is the best option where shading from adjacent plants is likely to be an issue. See Field Boundaries Technical Advice Sheet 2 for further advice.

15**In an arable situation or when erecting new fences adjacent to a hedge allow a minimum one metre margin of undisturbed vegetation.**

This provides good cover for birds such as partridge as well as food and overwintering sites for a variety of other wildlife. In an arable situation, allowing the development of a permanent strip of perennial vegetation will help to prevent undesirable weeds such as bindweed and thistles getting a foothold. The margin should be cut on a rotational basis, in conjunction with the hedge trimming, every two or three years.

Key Points list

Do not cut annually.

Plan any hedge management on a rotational basis across the farm.

Cut outside of the bird nesting season, ideally between December and mid-March.

Aim to produce a variety of hedge sizes on the farm.

All hedges will eventually require laying or coppicing.

Useful References

1. Field Boundaries Technical Information Sheet 3. Hedge trimming. Durham County Council.
2. Farming and Wildlife, A Practical Management Handbook. R.S.P.B. The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL. Tel:01767 680551
3. A Farmers Guide to Hedgerow and Field Margin Management. The Countryside Restoration Trust. Barton, Cambridgeshire, CB3 7AG. Tel : 01223 870932 or visit www.crtbarton.org.uk
4. Hedgelaying - a practical handbook. British Trust for Conservation Volunteers. Tel:01302 859522.
5. Field Boundaries Technical Information Sheet 2. Hedge Planting and Restoration. Durham County Council.
6. Field Boundaries Technical Guidance Card 1. Hedge Laying and Coppicing.

Useful contacts

1. Durham County Council, Hedgerow Project Officer for advice on good practice and grants for hedgerow management. Tel: 0191 383 4078
2. Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (F.W.A.G.) for advice on good practice, farm management plans and grants for hedgerow management. Tel: 01833 630 880.

Supported by

