

## Good Hedgerows Management.

Hedges which are left unattended grow upwards and outwards and will eventually become a line of trees. Tall bushy hedges provide the maximum habitat for wildlife but every hedge at different stages of its growth provides an advantage to some form of wildlife. Hedges too have different purposes, for example a tall dense hedge will provide a wind break, shorter but dense hedges make stock proof fences, whilst other may be used to prevent soil erosion. Each hedge therefore may require a different management regime at different stages of its life, recognising these stages of growth and applying the appropriate skills is the key to good hedgerow management.

The basic hedgerow management tools are:

**Trimming** – The use of the tractor mounted hedge flail is now a common sight in the winter months. It can be used to trim hedges which are bushy and thick at the base. Hedge trimming should not normally be carried out more than once every two years.

It is essential to maintain the equipment in good order and carry out the work at the correct speed. Each time a hedge is trimmed the cutter should be raised higher than the previous cut thus allowing the hedge to increase in height over a number of years. As an alternative to the common “Flail” cutter the circular saw blade type can also be used for this process.



**Coppicing** – Used when a hedge has many gaps is thin at the bottom and the stems are inappropriately spaced for laying. The stems are cut off at ground level and the remaining “stools” protected from browsing by Livestock, Deer, and Rabbits.



**Cropping** – If the hedge is thick at the bottom but is only very thin it can be cropped, that is the stems are cut with a chain saw or tractor mounted saw at approx 1m high. The hedge then bushes out from the top of the cut stem and creates thickness from this height which can then be managed in other ways.

**Gapping up** – Little can be done with excessively gappy hedges other than to replant the gaps. However it is best to determine what caused the gap in the first place, as without first tackling the prime cause of the gap efforts to fill up with new planting could be worthless. Examples of things which cause gaps in hedges are Polluted or poor soil, Infestation of Elderberry, Inappropriate use of chemical sprays etc.

**Hedge Laying** – Perhaps the best way to revitalise a hedge. Laying the hedge will make it stock proof, encourage it to grow vigorously and bring it into one of the other management regimes such as trimming. Some gapping up may be necessary.

**Re-Planting** - If a hedge is so sparse with very little shrubbery and many gaps then perhaps re-planting is the only option. Again it would be wise to try and establish the reason for the hedge being in this condition. Usually the best way to replant is to grub out all but the best shrubs and then re plant as a new hedge, but check that such an approach is acceptable to the authorities since hedges are protected by legislation and there may also be local conservation restrictions.

For other advice about hedgerow management see:  
[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)  
[www.hedgeline.org.uk](http://www.hedgeline.org.uk)  
[www.fwag.org.uk](http://www.fwag.org.uk)

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