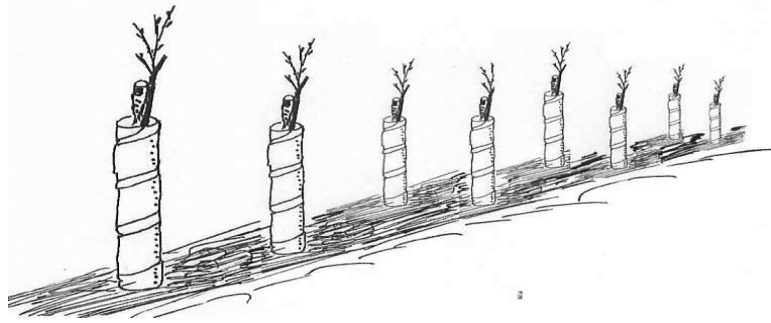


Planting a hedge.

Hedges are normally planted during the winter months when the trees and shrubs are in their dormant stage, but planning for a hedge must begin much earlier. Hedges may be planted for a variety of reasons, marking boundaries, creating wind breaks, hiding unsightly features, creating a scenic landscape, and encouraging wildlife, are just some of the purposes of a good hedge.



What type of Hedge?

The ground in which the hedge is to be planted needs to be considered. What type of soil is it? Does the ground need to be prepared? What type of plants should be used? Generally a mixture of native species are preferred but this is not necessarily so, depending on the purpose of the hedge and the type of soil. Some trees and shrubs prefer acid soils and others may need well-drained conditions. As a general rule:

For Livestock Use prickly plants, hawthorn (quicks) and blackthorn, as animals are deterred by them. But for Livestock shelter and Wildlife use a base of hawthorn and blackthorn, with occasional holly and/or beech, although these last two may be slow growing, many other plants can be used and lay well, but have disadvantages Ash - grows fast, but makes an edible hedge, Field maple - also edible to livestock and brittle to lay, Oak - slow-growing & edible, Hazel - lays well, but laid stems don't last very long, though they soon send up replacement shoots, Rose - though prickly, is often eaten. Never include elderberry or sycamore as although they grow fast, they shade out other plants near them and thus create gaps in the hedge. Shrubs which can be poisonous to livestock should also be avoided, yew, laurel, privet, etc.

For other types of hedge the choice is wide, almost any shrub or small tree, apart from firs, you can include lilac, crab apple, cotoneaster, wild pear, etc. Use those that grow best in your area, (look at the hedges around you), so that there are some colourful leaves / flowers / stems visible in places all year round.

Planting

Planting a long hedge can be a labour intensive job especially if the plants will need canes and guards to protect against rabbit or deer damage. It may also be appropriate to lay matting on the ground to suppress weed growth. If rabbit fencing is to be used then specialist equipment may be required.

If possible, dig (or plough a couple of furrows) on the hedge line and incorporate well-rotted manure in Spring/Summer, allowing the soil to settle in Autumn / early Winter, then plant up January/February. (NOTE: if you wish to use weed killer on the dug ground before planting, ensure it is a type that is neutralised on contact with soil.) If you have to dig holes and plant at the same time, dig the hole deeper than needed, put



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manure in the bottom and cover it with soil before putting the plant in. Manure 'burns' young roots, but they will find it when needed, and by then worms will have mixed it well with the soil.

Hedge Trees.

Consider adding hedge trees to your hedge. Oak or Ash to grow tall as standard mature trees. They should be spaced about every 30 Metres, and will require stakes and guards. Ensure that when the hedge is trimmed the trees are clearly visible so that the tops are not cut off.

Obtaining the plants.

Having decided what is required it will be necessary to obtain the plants. For large quantities commercial nurseries will provide better value for money than garden centres. Be prepared to shop around and order early. The more you buy, the cheaper each individual plant becomes. The plants are bare-rooted. If they arrive during snow or frost, put them in a plastic bag, shake potting compost around them, water well and keep in a frost-proof place until conditions improve. Once in the bag, it is an idea to remove the wire or string from around the plants. The 12 - 18 inch plants transplant better, but for a quicker result, the 2 - 3 feet plants are better. The number you buy depends on how thick you want your hedge. You can plant in either a single or double row, plants spaced about 9 inches apart. A double row allows for occasional failure without obvious gaps forming.

Care of the Growing Hedge.

Keep the weeds from smothering the plants, but a little grass around the base will protect the roots from the hot sun or hard frost. The sides can be trimmed so that they don't extend too far, but the top must be untouched for 12 months after which it can be trimmed. Lightly trim the top of the hedge every two to three years, each time raising the level of the cut slightly. This encourages the hedge to grow and bush out without creating a "lollipop on a stick" effect. When the hedge is Two and a half to Three Meters high it will be ready to lay, ideally the stems would be about the thickness of your arm. Laying will ensure that the hedge remains stock proof by thickening the base and encouraging bushy growth.

From the above it will be clear that planting any substantial length of hedge is not at all straightforward. For anyone who has not done the job before it is recommended that they seek advice from a reputable hedger. Remember, planting a hedge, which fails to grow, is a costly exercise.

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