

- If a landowner is claiming the Single Payment, it is a condition that their hedge cutting is not undertaken between 1 March & 31 July.
- Under the enhanced hedgerow management option (EB3) in Entry Level Stewardship, the period when hedges must not be cut is extended to 31 August. Similar restrictions will also apply to some hedges within Higher Level Stewardship schemes.
- The Hedgerow Regulations of 1997 prevent the removal of many hedges on agricultural land and advice should be sought from the Local Planning Authority prior to undertaking any works to remove any part of a hedge.
- If large volumes of wood are cut from the hedge a felling license may be required. Visit [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk) for further information.

## Sources of funding

- Hedges can attract support from both Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship schemes (administered by Natural England - [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)).
- The Entry Level Stewardship scheme rewards landowners for employing rotational hedge management (every other year or once in three). There are a range of hedgerow grants available under the competitive Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. These include capital works options that support hedge restoration by coppicing and steeping. Grants to encourage new hedge planting and bank construction are also available.
- The Working Wetlands Small Grant Award may be able to support hedge restoration works, particularly on small sites where HLS may not be available. Contact the Working Wetlands team for more details: tel 01409 221823; email [working.wetlands@devonwildlifetrust.org](mailto:working.wetlands@devonwildlifetrust.org)

## Sources of information

- Hedgeline is a very good source of advice and information. [www.hedgeline.org.uk](http://www.hedgeline.org.uk)
- Natural England have published a Devon hedge restoration information note. [www.naturalengland.etraderstores.com](http://www.naturalengland.etraderstores.com)
- Devon Hedge Group – very useful information sheets are available on their website [www.devon.gov.uk/hedges](http://www.devon.gov.uk/hedges) and as hard copy on request; tel 01392 382257, email [hedges@devon.gov.uk](mailto:hedges@devon.gov.uk)



Hedges and hedgerow trees help define Devon's landscape, and the Culm area is no exception. Hedges represent living-history, often recording land divisions going back many hundreds and in some cases thousands of years. They can also mark parish boundaries or border historic routes across the countryside.

A traditional Devon hedge consists of a substantial earth bank, faced with turf or stone, and has woody shrubs growing along the top. There is considerable variation in Devon's hedges, in their bank structure and the species present.



## Hedges in the Culm landscape

Thick, well-maintained hedges form effective livestock barriers. They also provide shelter and wind protection for both stock and crops. Earth banks reduce soil erosion and nutrient run-off during heavy rainfall. The woody shrub growth also provides shelter, food and corridors for wildlife movement across farmland, including endangered species such as dormice. Unmanaged field margins beside hedges provide refuges for wildlife and help support beneficial insects which prey on crop pests. Hedges are also often found next to wet ditches and watercourses which provide valuable additional habitats.

Modern farming techniques - including use of larger machinery and a reduction in the farm workforce, coupled with historic production incentives - encouraged widespread hedgerow removal. The Culm has however, retained a landscape which is comparatively rich in hedgerows.

The annual management of hedgerows can be time-consuming and costly. The cost-effectiveness of tractor-mounted flails is a major factor that has caused the decline of traditional hedge-laying (or steeping) practice. Over-management of hedges encourages growth at the cutting point which in turn can lead to gaps forming at their base. This reduces a hedgerow's effectiveness both as a livestock barrier and a wildlife resource.



Hedge-laying

## Devon hedge laying

Hedge laying is a traditional hedge management technique that restores vigorous growth to the base of the hedge. This helps to maintain and restore a stock-proof barrier.

Left unmanaged hedges will eventually form a line of trees. The dense tree cover overshadows the bank causing the hedgerow's base to become gappy.

## Hedge laying and restoration tips

- Hedge restoration work is best done when the hedge is dormant (between mid November and end of February).
- Clear the hedge and bank of material not going to be laid. This could include deadwood, dense herbaceous growth, ivy, brambles, old fence stakes and wire.
- Select material to be laid – steepers (the laid stem) will usually be less than 10cm at the base.
- Larger stems, not selected as hedgerow trees, can be coppiced (an angled cut about 10cm from bank level).
- Prepare your steeper by pruning large side branches and any top heavy material.
- Always lay uphill and in the same direction. Lay towards the south on level ground.
- Make an angled cut near the base of the steeper until the remaining part of the stem is flexible enough to lay along the bank ( $\frac{3}{4}$  of stem width is about right).
- Lay the stem down on the top of the hedgebank (often in two parallel lines either side) and secure in place with crooks (see photo).
- Hedgelaying is often carried out in conjunction with casting-up – digging slumped material from the base of the bank and replacing it on the crown. Ensure newly coppiced and laid material is not buried in deep earth.
- Any gaps should be planted up with native species seen growing on the farm. It is essential to control weeds and grass around newly planted whips.
- Select and clearly mark hedgerow trees that will be allowed to grow to maturity. Irregular spacing is best to suit the local landscape.
- Don't lay all of your hedges in any one year – aim for 10%.
- Allow a wildlife strip of at least 2m of taller herbs and grasses to develop to buffer your hedge from adjacent operations.



Recently laid hedge

## Mechanised flailing: best practice

- **Do not cut the same hedge every year, except where it is necessary for road safety. Many trees and shrubs only produce nuts and berries on second year growth.**
- **Aim to cut hedges on a two or three year rotation. Where possible, adjacent sections of hedge should be cut in different years.**
- **Single-out strong shoots or saplings to grow into hedgerow trees at varying intervals. Mark these trees clearly and ensure contractors are aware of them so that they can be avoided during cutting. Ash and oak make good hedgerow trees.**
- **Try to cut hedges as late as possible, ideally during January or February, if ground conditions permit. Never cut during bird nesting season (between 1 March & 31 August).**
- **Clear communication with hedging contractors is key, and a hedge-trimming plan should be followed (especially for hedges covered by Environmental Stewardship agreements).**
- **The flail should be raised by a small amount each year to avoid the hedge being trimmed to the same height each time. Trimming at the same height results in old shoots becoming woody and splintered, and reduces density at the hedge base.**