



Regenerating Derelict Hedgerows

In the North York Moors hedges have been traditionally managed by laying every 10-20 years to stockproof and regenerate them. If hedges are not managed then free growth of the trees will eventually result in mature trees. Continual annual trimming over a long period of time can lead to deterioration, through gaps, hollow bottoms and die back. In both cases a means of management must be considered if the hedge is to survive in the long term.

This information aims to provide general guidance on the standard of work required for projects grant aided by the National Park Authority.

Laying

(i) Timing and Weather Conditions

Hedge laying is generally done between October and March. In upland areas, laying is often done after mid-February to avoid the risk of hard frosts.

As a general guide, the leaves should have started to 'turn' before work begins and it is best to stop when the buds start to burst in the Spring.

Avoid laying a hedge during or soon before a hard frost as stems become brittle and frost can damage plants with fresh cuts. Older stems are most susceptible to frost.

(ii) Preliminary Management

'Siding-up' may be necessary before laying. This involves side trimming of the hedge for 2-3 years before laying to produce strong leading shoots and an overall hedge height of 2-3 m (8-12').

All old fencing material, dead wood, bramble, rose and elder present in the hedge should be removed before laying.

(iii) Method of Laying

Each pleacher (the living stem) should be cut 2.5-10 cm (1-4") above ground level. The actual height of cut will vary depending on the thickness of the stem.

The 'hinge' should be left as thick as practical so nutrients can reach the pleacher whilst allowing it to be laid over without back splitting.

Both the Yorkshire method (where the pleachers are laid close to the ground) and the Midland method (where the pleachers are laid at 25°- 45°) are acceptable.

As a general rule, pleachers should be laid up the slope on inclines. Under most circumstances pleachers should be laid in one direction only but laying both ways is acceptable where there are gaps. Small gaps, less than 1 m, can be filled with trimming as dead wood provides a valuable wildlife habitat. The laid pleachers should be interwoven through stakes placed at approximately 1 m intervals. Stakes should generally be 4–5 cm (1½–2") in diameter.

iv) After Laying

Any gaps left after laying should be planted up with young plants (see Specifications for Hedge Planting).

Protective fencing will be required to protect the new growth from livestock. There should be a minimum of 1m left on either side of the laying and planting (see Specifications for Stockproof Fencing).

Coppicing

Coppicing rejuvenates mature plants. This method is best used where the hedge is too large or too low to lay or if there is a lot of deadwood in the stems of the hedge.

(i) Timing and Weather Conditions

Coppicing should be carried out in the winter months during spells of mild weather.

(ii) Method

All stems should be trimmed by a clean-angled cut to a desired height (around 7.5 cm (3") from ground level) and angled to shed water.

If the hedge plants are of a large size then they should be felled and the stumps trimmed afterwards.

(iii) After Coppicing

Any gaps left after coppicing should be planted up with young plants (see Specifications for Hedge Planting).

Protective fencing will be required to protect the new growth from livestock. There should be a minimum of 1m left on either side between coppicing and planting (see Specifications for Stockproof Fencing).

Allow regrowth for 7-10 years before laying the young stems.

Hedgerow Management

(i) Gapping Up

As a general rule it is not necessary to plant up gaps of 1 metre or less as regrowth should be sufficient to fill the gap. For larger gaps, laying across the gap will not ensure that it will close permanently so planting is necessary. Rabbit netting or quills may be required to protect the planting.

Layering (when a laid pleacher is dug into the ground) is acceptable as a means of establishing new root stock in a gap.

Reference should be made to the Specifications for Hedge Planting.

(ii) Cutting

Cutting should be carried out between the end of December and the beginning of March to avoid the breeding season of birds, and to retain winter cover and food for birds. Hedges should not be trimmed when there is a hard frost or during the spring flush.

Two growing seasons should be allowed between trimming as fewer birds and small mammals are observed in intensively managed hedges. Frequent trimming can be damaging to the hedge in the long term.

(iii) Shape

An 'A' shaped or topped 'A' shaped hedge has advantages for wildlife, for the growth of the hedge and is the most effective wind-break allowing wind to pass over it with less turbulence. An 'A' shape promotes thick growth at the hedge base which is important for food and shelter for wildlife.

Tall, thick hedges with woody outgrowths are of the greatest value for breeding birds. A rectangular shape normally means that one side of the hedge is severely shaded, which will inhibit growth.

(iv) Size

The number of nesting or feeding bird species is strongly linked to hedgerow size. Approximately double the number of bird species occur in taller hedges (i.e. over 1.4 m (4'6")) compared with shorter hedges. This is because they provide shelter from predators, good nesting sites and more food.

Other important factors include the number of shrub species in the hedge and the proximity of other features such as ponds and woodlands.

(v) Tools

The type of hedgecutter used influences the growth of the hedge. Tractor mounted circular saw blades may be used on heavy growth and to reshape overgrown hedges.

Flail hedge trimmers are the most common tools but used on heavy growth they can cause unsightly cuts, splintering the plants and causing fungal infection and die-back.

Flail cutters should not be used on woody stems of over 3 years growth.

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