

Hedges for Wildlife

Hedges not only serve the purpose of boundaries around your garden, offering you privacy and protection, but they are also valuable wildlife habitats.

The combination of shrubs, trees and hedge bottom plants provide food and shelter for an enormous range of animals, from the smallest insects to large predators like barn owls. Hedges are often called 'wildlife corridors' as they link up wild areas, providing a route by which both plants and animals can move between habitats.

By planting up a new hedge, you can make great space for nature, whilst creating a much more interesting and colourful boundary than a fence or wall.



Speckled Wood Butterfly

Hedges & Wildlife

Hedges are refuges for many of our woodland flowers, while tussocks of grass and tall herbs found in hedge bottoms are important overwintering sites for invertebrates, and also provide good breeding conditions for many of our common butterflies. Spring blossoms, like the hawthorn or May flower, are vital nectar sources for early emerging insects, while hedge climbers like honeysuckle and ivy will provide food for insects later in the year.

The abundance of small mammals in hedgerows, including hedgehogs, field mice and pigmy shrews, make them excellent hunting territory for larger predators such as stoats, foxes and birds of prey. Several garden birds including robins, wrens and blackbirds often make their



Hedgehog



Mature Hedge

nests in hedges, and bats may also be found flying along hedges, as they often use these linear features as navigational tools.

Which plants to use

The first rule when choosing species for your new hedge is to look at the hedges in your local area. Use the species present in mature hedges in your locality as a guide to the new hedge mix, as this will not only help to preserve the character of the area but will ensure that your plants are well suited to the local soils and climate.

Native trees and shrubs are the best choices for wildlife, but be aware that many suppliers will stock native species grown on the continent and shipped over. If possible, source 'local origin' trees. The term 'local origin' means that the trees are grown from seed collected from naturally occurring native trees growing in Northern Ireland. These plants are better adapted to local

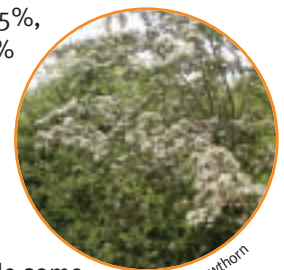
conditions and the timing of events such as budburst and flowering are more likely to complement our local wildlife.

Choice of species will also depend upon the function of your hedge. If you want to create a conservation hedge to attract and sustain wildlife, use a wide selection of native species. A recommended mix would be: hawthorn 50%, blackthorn 15%, hazel 15% and 20% of other species selected from guelder rose, spindle, dog rose and holly.

Also try and include some hedgerow trees such as crab apple, oak, ash, willow or alder.



Blackthorn



Hawthorn

Hedges for Wildlife

How to plant your hedge

Small plants (40-60cm tall) are more cost effective and will establish better than larger ones. It is a good idea to reduce competition from grasses and perennial weeds. This can be done by mowing and removing any rough grass along the hedge strip during the summer prior to planting. Cultivation of the soil prior to planting is recommended as it helps break up the turf layer.

Hedge Planting Tips

- Hedges can be planted in a single row or in double rows - see diagram below
- To maintain local style, it is sometimes desirable to create a hedge bank and plant on top of it. In the case of very wet soils, this may be a definite requirement.
- If using bare root trees, the planting season is from the beginning of October to the end of March. Cell-grown trees can be planted at any time of year, providing the ground is not frozen or waterlogged. Autumn is considered the best time to plant in free draining ground, spring if the ground is heavy.
- Plants should be placed into the ground at the same depth as they were in the nursery. This is marked by the root collar, usually identified by a change in colour in the stem just above the root.
- Ensure the plant is firmed in well. All damaged or dead shoots should be removed at the time of planting.
- When planting in autumn, hawthorn and blackthorn should be pruned back immediately after they are firmed in.
- Replace any hedge plants that fail to establish after the first year.



Hawthorn Berries

Management

Pruning hawthorn and blackthorn in the first few years after planting will encourage the shrubs to branch more from the base, giving a thicker hedge, which is better for boundaries and for wildlife. Immediately after planting in autumn, prune each plant to about 15cm, or one third its height. In the second winter, cut back the previous season's growth by about one half. In the third winter, trim the lateral shoots to an even shape.

During the early period of establishment, watch out for signs of drought,



Wren

and water the hedge if necessary. For the initial 3-4 years, it is important to control competing weeds, either by hand weeding, mulching, or careful application of glyphosate herbicides.



Hawthorn Flowering

This guide should give you the basics you need to get started with creating your wildlife hedge. For more detailed information on hedges get in touch with UWT and ask for copies of our 'Planning & Planting a New Hedge' and 'Hedge Management & Restoration' habitat guides.

You can download more Make Space for Nature information guides from our website www.ulsterwildlifetrust.org or contact us on 028 44830282 or email info@ulsterwildlifetrust.org.

