

Supporting guidance for Planting or Replanting of Hedges

This is an old version of the page

Date published: 1 December, 2017

Date superseded: 15 December, 2025

Note : In November 2023, references to Scottish Natural Heritage have been amended to NatureScot. Broken links have also been updated.

For recent changes to this guidance, please see the [bottom of the page](#) .

Hedges are a valuable habitat on farmland but Scotland has lost significant lengths of its hedgerow network. Most of the loss, over the past 10 to 20 years, has been through decline and decay in hedge structure rather than through removal. This loss has not been matched by new planting.

Whilst the creation of new hedges on your farm will help to address this balance, the priority should be to enhance the wildlife and landscape value of existing hedges on your farm.

The creation of new hedgerows will help to link other hedgerows and strengthen habitat corridors, particularly within more intensive arable and grassland landscapes where the habitat network may be very weak.

The [Hedgerow Management Cycle](#) guide shows the stages in the hedge management cycle when hedge replanting or gapping-up is likely to be needed.

Which species should I choose?

The choice and proportion of species for your hedge depends on your location and the role of the hedge. The guide to [Trees and Shrubs Native to Scotland \(PDF, Size: 26.1 kB\)](#) shows the range of native trees and shrubs approved by NatureScot for planting in the wild in Scotland.

In addition, you may include beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) where it is traditional in hedges locally, with prior approval. Wherever possible, use planting stock of local provenance.

With the exception of beech and sycamore, planting a non-native species, like Japanese rose (*Rosa rugosa*), would be an offence under the Wildlife Countryside Act.

Planting

The booklet [Hedgerow Planting: Answers to 18 Common Questions](#) provides a useful introduction to hedge planting, as does the Hedgelink video clip, [A Cut Above the Rest – Hedge Planting](#).

The item requirement is for plants to be established in double-staggered rows at a density of six plants per metre for new planting. As a guide this is approximately a size nine boot distance between plants in the rows. The distance between rows can vary depending on the function of the hedge: hedges that will be livestock-proof and / or laid should have the rows narrower, again about a boot-width apart, whilst others may be 50 to 60 centimetres apart. Remember, the wider the hedge, the wider the fences will need to be to accommodate its growth outwards.

You can vary the proportions of species in the hedge. A typical mix would be 60 to 80 per cent hawthorn with three to four other species such as crab apple, hazel, blackthorn, holly each making up between 5 per cent and 15 per cent of the mix. When planting, plant the minor species first, to get a suitable distribution, and in-fill with the major species. Plant the same species in groups of at least one metre, to avoid single plants being out-competed by other species.

Protection

Protect young and developing hedge plants from browsing by animals. Effective protection from deer by fencing is very difficult if the rate of growth from young plants is weak. Assess this risk and make sure that new plants are established under the best possible conditions to gain good, strong growth from the start.

For new, young hedges, control competing vegetation in the first two years of establishment. Use a herbicide or mulch. Take care with the selection and application of chemicals to avoid damaging the hedge plants.

The minimum requirement for livestock fencing is for it to be sited one metre away from the centre line of the hedge. However, it is often better to fence further away to allow space for the hedge's expansion and to leave room for trimming, coppicing or laying the hedge in the future.

Follow up management

The young hedges should be brought into a long-term programme of management as presented in the [Hedgerow Management Cycle](#).

Planting for hedge restoration

Older hedges tend to become 'gappy' and planting up the gaps is a good way to restore hedges. If the gaps are wide then planting should be successful.

Only gaps of five metres and above attract a separate capital payment under the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme. NatureScot advises that smaller gaps of two to five metres are also replanted over the course of the contract, as part of ongoing management. This will improve the condition of the hedge, (part of the Management, Restoration or Creation of Hedgerow annual payment accounts for some gapping up).

However, planting underneath a canopy of trees and shrubs is rarely satisfactory as the new plants need to compete for both daylight and water against their larger, established neighbours. This is particularly the case for heavy shade-bearing trees such as beech and sycamore. It is generally best to coppice the existing bushes and replant the gaps, and allow the coppice re-growth and the new plants to establish together.

For planting under mature hedgerow trees, consider options to increase daylight into the hedge by, for example, 'raising the crown' of the tree (removing lower branches), coppicing or pollarding. In addition, select species which are more shade-tolerant, such as holly and hazel for planting under trees. Beech is the most suitable species for planting under beech trees.

Further information

Some local authorities have developed strategic plans for building habitat networks. Contact your local Biodiversity Officer to find out how your plans for hedge planting may support wider objectives.

The [Hedgeline](#) website contains information on all aspects of hedges and hedge management.

For more information about the law on non-native species see the [NatureScot website](#).

Further guidance is available under the separate capital items:

- [Stock Fence](#)
- [Vole, Rabbit or Hare Guards](#)
- [Replacement or Planting of Individual Trees within Ancient Wood Pasture or Hedgerows](#)
- [Coppicing of Hedges](#)

Recent changes

Section	Change
Which species should I choose?	We've updated the 'Trees and Shrubs Native to Scotland' document

Previous versions

[Previous versions of this page](#)