

Hedgerows form an important wildlife network through much of the country. Devon is particularly significant in that it supports more hedgerow than any other county and about 20% of the total length of the species-rich hedgerows left in the UK. Many hedges in Devon are found on a bank and have an associated ditch. Hedgerows form an important feature of the farmed landscape of Devon and support a wide range of plant, insect, bird and mammal species. They protect soils from erosion and store carbon.

General management guidelines:

Tailor management to suit individual hedge composition and local conditions. This applies to both the type of management and the timing of the management (refer to the Hedgeline booklet: The Hedgerow Management Cycle (see link on bottom of opposite page)).

Degradation is most commonly caused by over or under cutting. Over cutting causes stress and dieback, leading to the formation of gaps. Undercutting means the hedge grows more than is desirable. If left the hedgerow may develop into a row of trees and will not be stock proof.

Cross compliance regulations state that hedgerows should not be cut between 1 March and 31 August (unless the hedge overhangs a road (obstructing passage), the hedge is dead / diseased, to carry out hedge laying/coppicing (1 March - 30 April) or to hand trim a hedge laid within last 6 months).

Trim hedges at the end of winter. If this is not possible late autumn is the best alternative. If trimming must occur while berries are still present then avoid cutting the top of the hedge so some fruits remain.



Blackthorn, a common hedgerow species



Recently laid hedge



A 'woody knuckle'

If a hedge is freshly laid or coppiced then a light annual trim is recommended for the first few years, followed by a trim once every two or three years. This promotes healthy growth and fruiting. Hedges cut every three years produce three times as many berries as those cut annually and 40% more than those cut every two years.

As soon as a 'woody knuckle' (see photo) begins to develop the cut height should be increased by ten centimetres. Increasing by 10cm every cut is best for hedgerow health. This will prolong the longevity and condition of the hedge.

Even with perfect management, sections of hedges will need to be laid or coppiced eventually. This may also be the case with sections that are in very poor condition.

Where the hedge is next to a public right of way and must be trimmed every year, avoid cutting other vegetation at the base, as it is valuable to many species.



Well connected hedgerows

Sources of further information and funding may be available from:

Hedgelink:

Web address: <http://www.hedgelink.org.uk/>
The Hedgerow Management Cycle booklet: http://www.hedgelink.org.uk/cms/cms_content/files/78_hedgelink_a5_12pp_leaflet_7.pdf

Devon Hedge Group:

Web address: <http://devonhedges.org/>
Contact: hedges@devon.gov.uk

Blackdown Hills Hedge Association:

Web address: <http://bhha.info/>

Devon Rural Skills Trust:

Web address: <https://sites.google.com/site/devonruralskillstrust/home>
Email: devonruralskillstrust@gmail.com

Natural England: Countryside Stewardship management options/capital works grants

Web address: <https://www.gov.uk/countryside-stewardship-grants>

Email: devon@naturalengland.org.uk
Tel: 0300 0601110

Saving Devon's Treescapes:

Web address: <https://www.devonwildlifetrust.org/what-we-do/our-projects/saving-devons-treescapes>

On sites with large numbers of hedges cut them on rotation. Where large lengths are to be cut in one year, vary the timing. On small sites only manage a portion of a hedge in one year. This provides the widest range of habitats.

Allow some hedgerow trees to persist to maturity. Where safe to do so maintain deadwood, ditches and banks that may be associated with the hedge.

Leave the uncultivated margin ungrazed where possible. Avoid drift and spray of fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides into the hedge, hedge bottoms, and verges. Avoid ploughing near to the hedge or verges. Maintain and encourage connectivity to other hedges and woodlands.

For information on gathering wood fuel from hedges as a means to make hedgerow management financially viable refer to the 'Hedgelink' website (see link below)

Hedges meeting certain criteria (including size, age and composition) are subject to the Hedgerow Regulations (1997). Permission will be needed from the local authority to remove such hedges. Further advice should be sought if the removal of a hedgerow is planned.



Under managed hedgerow

