

WILD YOUR SPACE

Wild your school
Rewild your children

Brash Hedge (or Dead Hedge)

Brash hedges are growing in popularity everywhere you look (woodland areas, gardens, farms, etc.), and it's easy to see why. They are inexpensive, whilst being simple and great fun to make. There is probably nothing else that you can create in a school playground in such a short space of time, that requires very little skill, and yet brings so many benefits to both wildlife and people. This is nature restoration in one of its simplest of forms.



These structures are ideal for playgrounds that have trees in them, or around the boundary, or even a woodland close by. Sticks and other woody materials that would have been put in the bin, or worse - burned in a bonfire, now have an opportunity to breakdown and rot through time, where they will ultimately return their nutrients to the soil – just as nature intended. Furthermore, by arranging them like this you are keeping play areas tidy and safer. These really are a win, win feature that everyone can quickly learn to love.

We prefer the term *Brash Hedges* to *Dead Hedges*, because these hedges are anything but dead. Anyone who looks closely enough will know that you can normally find more life in dead wood than you can on live wood. As such a Brash Hedge is a wonderful habitat for many forms of wildlife and creates hiding places, nesting sites and feeding opportunities. When properly situated they can also be an important part of a wildlife corridor – encouraging new visitors to move in and out of your wildlife friendly areas.

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Construction

Before you start building, think carefully about your ideal location. Perhaps this could work as a useful divider to separate sections of your playground, or to hide a composting area, or to provide a windbreak for plants or a pond. While always thinking about it's important benefit as a wildlife corridor to connect different habitats.

The availability and the size of branches, cuttings and various materials will likely determine the height, width and depth of your Brash Hedge, so gather together everything you are going to use and take it from there. Ideally you want to use some of your stronger and fresher branches to make the stakes (cut to length and sharpened at one end), but you may need to purchase stakes (your only expense – assuming that you can borrow the tools). We'd suggest, if you have a plentiful supply of materials, that stakes are put in a line at approx. 50cm apart, then another line staggered, rather than directly opposite, allowing a depth of also approx. 50cm. Stake lengths should be the desired hedge height - plus 60cm ground depth and an additional 30cm height.

Still Need a Hand?

Watch this short, but useful RSPCA Video to see how it's done - How to make a dead hedge

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzfKVScxJXU&t=2s>

In terms of tools, you'll only need a mallet and a saw (or a couple of different saws). The sort of things that many parents, or grandparents will be happy to provide – they may even come along to help out.

And, if you get stuck – never hesitate to ask the Bright Green Nature team for some friendly advice.

That's what we're here for!

A Learning Experience

Children will love helping to build, and continually top-up a brash hedge. They can then learn about the all the wildlife that will benefit – including insects, birds and mammals. They can also learn about the importance of simply allowing wood to decay (a key, yet often overlooked, natural process), whilst finding out about the essential roles of fungi.

Here are a few Bright Green Nature **Top Tips...**

- Keep the bottom of the pile quite loose and open. This will suit hedgehogs and amphibians.
- Don't make it too tidy. Birds will enjoy having perches to choose from.
- Only use woody materials – no grass cuttings or hedge trimmings.
- Weaving longer more pliable lengths will strengthen the overall structure.
- Top up gently – don't be tempted to push down hard.
- Encourage more diversity by growing native climbers up the sides, and by scattering wild flower seeds near the base.
- Consider incorporating bug hotels and hedgehog houses.



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