

WILD YOUR SPACE

Wild your school
Rewild your children

Native Hedges

The pictures shown below may not represent your first thoughts when asked to picture a hedge. Most people think of something much more orderly and manicured – “tidy” even. But hedges are incredibly important to wildlife, and hedges such as the ones pictured, will undoubtedly support a far more abundant diversity of species than any carefully trimmed privet. And either planting a new hedge, or simply doing less cutting of an existing hedge will greatly assist any nature restoration goals that you have.



In a rural landscape that has changed so much over the last few hundred years, hedges have become a lifeline for many invertebrates, mammals and birds – supporting over 2,000 species in the UK. Healthy native hedgerows serve as homes, shelters, food sources, navigation aids and connecting corridors for much of our most loved wildlife species.

Many school grounds will already benefit from hedges in and around the various playground areas. Where you do have them, we ask you to look closely at them – are they valued and maintained in a wildlife friendly manner? Are there gaps where the hedge was once complete? Would it be possible to connect disjointed sections of hedges? Are your hedges made up with true native species? Is vegetation allowed to grow freely and naturally at the base? Where there are few or no hedges, we ask you to consider if

there is space to add one (or more), or even just a selection of native hedging plants.

A healthy hedge should be thick and dense. Studies have shown that taller, wider hedges contain more floral species of benefit to pollinators. Denser, well-connected hedges benefit small mammals, as does vegetation at the base of



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hedges, which provide extra food as well as cover from predators.

The good news is that existing hedges can be improved by altering the way they are maintained, and, planting a new hedge does not require a huge amount of time or skill.

We are always here to help if you need specific advice and assistance, but here are some helpful Bright Green Nature **Top Tips...**

Maintaining Established Hedges

- Trimming hedges on a rotational basis (by reducing cutting to once every 2-4 years) greatly increases the amount of blossom produced, as most hedges flower on second year wood.
- Use incremental cutting, trimming about 10cm higher and wider than the previous trim line each year.
- Trim at the right time for wildlife! Ideally late January/February, to ensure the berry larder can sustain wildlife throughout the Winter. Never cut hedges between 1st March and 31st
- August, while birds are nesting – to do so can be illegal!

Planting a new hedge

- Hedges can stand alone or be planted alongside existing fences or walls.
- Hedges can be planted out as a single row or a double staggered row as follows - Single row: 4-6 plants/metre (depending on species), Double row: 6 plants/metre.
- Selecting a variety of plant species (see native species listed below) will help to support a range of different animals. It's best to group species with similar growing rates, so that more vigorous plants don't out-compete slower growing species.

- If you want to replace an existing non-native hedge, you don't have to do it all in one go: replacing it in stages will give nature time to find new shelter, as well as helping you spread the work.
- A good supplier will provide specific guidance on how to handle your plants as soon as they're delivered and how to care for them while they establish (we can also help with this).
- Locally grown trees are best: they're used to similar environmental conditions to those they will experience in your plot, and you'll reduce the carbon footprint of your project. In the Scottish Borders, we generally recommend Cheviot Trees for this reason.

Maintaining a new hedge

- Keep plants well-watered until they are established.
- If you use mulch, top up periodically.
- If you use tree guards, remove and recycle these once the trees are established.
- Trim hedges regularly in years 2-5, then switch to rotational trimming (ideally once every 3 years). Use incremental cutting, trimming about 10cm higher and wider than the previous trim line each year until a dense hedge structure has been achieved.

For tree tree and hedge plants visit:

**[woodlandtrust.org.uk/
plant-trees/schools-and-
communities/](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/schools-and-communities/)**

And don't forget about the Bright Green Nature Microgrant:

**[brightgreennature.org/
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