

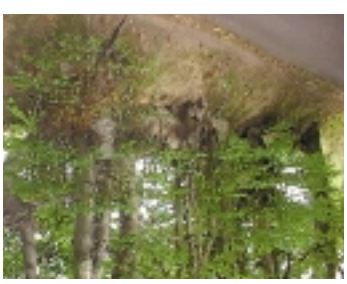
What is a Weald hedge? A boundary feature less than five metres wide and made up of predominantly shrub and/or tree species.

Planted hedges are mainly due to the enclosures in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many are straight and were created using hawthorn. These hedges are most common in the Low Weald.



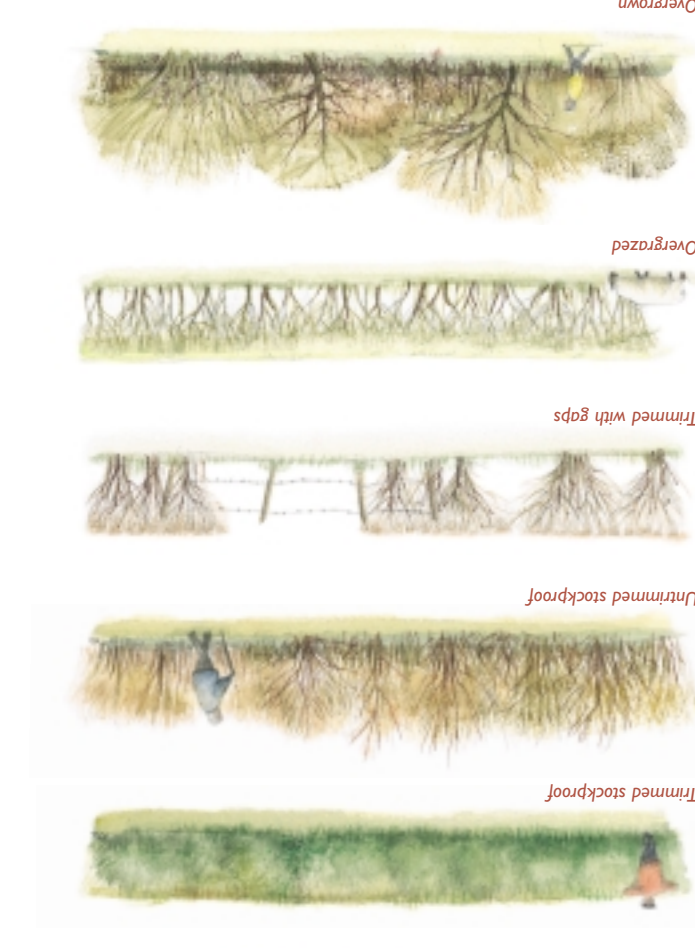
Some natural hedges have appeared as a result of neglect, developing in areas that are difficult to graze or crop such as along the edges of ditches, streams, fence lines and woodlands.

Hedges represent decisions made by our ancestors over many hundreds of years. Hedges in the Weald have several functions: they indicate land ownership and administrative boundaries; help to manage livestock; provide shelter for farm animals and crops; and were once a source of timber and fuel.



Hedges in the Weald

Other boundary features Showstrews – strips of broadleaved woodland, often 9-12 metres wide, between fields or along roadsides. Managed as woodland, they remain a distinctive feature of the High Weald landscape.



What type of hedge do I own? To determine the type of hedge you have on your farm or in your garden, look at the hedge's structure and shape. Knowing the hedge type will help you to decide the most appropriate management.



Hedge types

A few words about pesticides and fertiliser Many insects and hedgerow plants are extremely vulnerable to pesticides and fertilisers. To protect the hedge from these do not spray in windy or very calm conditions. Ideally, establish a permanent grass field margin alongside the hedge which remains unsprayed and unfertilised.

- a barrier to prevent the spread of diseases, and to air down hills;
■ the prevention of frost hollows by blocking the flow of cold air down hills;
■ the conservation of both soil and soil-water
■ shelter for livestock and crops
■ wildlife 'corridor' linking different habitats
■ nesting and shelter places for birds and other animals
■ song posts and viewpoints for birds
■ weasels prey on rabbits, and shrews eat slugs
■ an attractive habitat for the birds and predatory mammals
■ a valuable food source (fruit, nuts and insects) for a variety of birds (including game birds such as partridge) and mammals (such as the hedgehog)
■ a home for a variety of insects including beetles, butterflies, moths and bumble bees. These insects are valuable in the pollination of fruit, legumes, rape, horticultural crops and garden plants; and predatory insects feed on, and control, weeds and garden pests such as aphids



Why should I manage my hedge? While some of the original functions of hedges are no longer relevant, many Weald farms and gardens still retain hedges. They remain fundamental to the landscape, are often historic, and, together with field margins, provide important wildlife habitats. More specifically, good management of your hedge will provide the following benefits:

WARNING Do not cut during the bird nesting season between 1 March and 1 September. It is an offence, under Section 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981), to intentionally damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is being used or built.

Do I need to cut my hedge every year? Not necessarily. Cutting on a two or three year rotation has dual benefits. It creates a bushier hedge for wildlife and reduces maintenance costs. However, it may be necessary to carry out an annual light trim for road safety purposes.



During which season should I cut my hedge? Hedges can be trimmed, laid and coppiced from September to February, but you should aim to cut as late in the winter as possible and avoid damaging frosts. Cutting in January or February ensures that nuts and berries are available longer for birds and mammals.

Which shape should I choose for my hedge? There are several possible hedge shapes, each with merits and drawbacks for wildlife and farming. Generally, overall volume is more important than shape – a tall, thick, bushy hedge is more valuable for wildlife than a low thin one.



Free growing hedges, cut on a longer cycle of 10 to 20 years, maintain a dense base, coppicing and shearing, create woody shoots many otherwise result. Grading cuts to allow a machinery suits the size of the stems being cut. Splintered sharp blades and ensuring that the little more growth each year will provide a thicker hedge.

HEDGE MAINTENANCE - TRIMMING TECHNIQUES A combination of trimming, laying and coppicing techniques suits most hedgerows. However, it is important to continue local traditions in hedge management if possible.

Hedges in the Weald



Hedges surround the irregular shaped fields of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, linking the area's many woodlands.

Hedges are a distinctive feature of the High Weald – a valued Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in the rural heart of South East England. The High Weald is a historic countryside of rolling hills draped by small, irregularly shaped fields, abundant woods and hedges, scattered farmsteads and sunken lanes.



Further information High Weald AONB Unit, Corner Farm, Hastings Road, Flimwell, East Sussex, TN5 7PR. Tel: 01580 879500. Email: info@highweald.org. Web: www.highweald.org



Hedge-laying is an ancient craft with many different styles practised throughout Britain. Stems, known as pleachers, are partially cut with an axe, billhook or saw, just above ground level, and lowered to an angle of 30 to 45 degrees. The tops of the pleachers are woven between equally-spaced stakes. A top binding of hazel (called hetherings) holds the hedge firm. The finished height of the hedge needs to be 1.25m. From the Garland Collection, of West Sussex County Records Office

HEDGE REJUVENATION - LAYING, COPPICING AND GAPPING UP

Hedge-laying and coppicing are traditional methods of rejuvenating hedges that have become overgrown or gappy, due to neglect, old age or poor management. Most hedges will require laying or coppicing at intervals of between 10 and 25 years to keep them stockproof.

What does 'coppicing' mean? Coppicing involves cutting individual trees and shrubs back to the base and allowing them to re-grow. It is particularly useful where the base of a hedge has become a row of large leggy stems. Some stems should be left to grow on as tall standard trees in the hedgeline. In any one year, coppice only sections of a hedge to reduce the impact on wildlife and landscape.

What does hedge-laying involve? Hedge-laying is a method of stockproofing a gappy hedge. Ideally the hedge should be between three to five metres high. This provides enough stem and bush to make the finished hedge strong and stockproof and to provide more shelter for birds.

How do I fill the gap in my hedge? By planting locally occurring, native species. Mulching the new plants is beneficial to retain moisture and suppress weeds. Protection from grazing stock and rabbits may also be necessary.

Where might I plant a new hedge? In a variety of locations. You could plant along the line of an old hedge that has been removed, or along fence lines where larger fields have been divided. Hedgerows might also be planted between existing woods, copses, shaws or hedges, linking with other habitats like wildflower grasslands and ponds, to create wildlife 'corridors'. Hedges are ideal for new boundaries around gardens, paddocks and orchards. Again, use species traditionally found in the Weald that are suited to the local soils.



There are a number of organisations who can advise and assist with hedge maintenance and rejuvenation. Contact the High Weald AONB Unit for details or visit www.highweald.org

For sources of further information on the regulations contact your planning authority.

Hedges and the law

Are there any regulations which apply to hedges? Yes. The Hedgerow Regulations were introduced in 1997 to protect important hedgerows in the countryside. The regulations state that it is a criminal offence, unless an exception applies, to deliberately remove a hedgerow without permission.

To which hedgerows do the regulations apply? The regulations apply to most countryside hedgerows in England and Wales. They apply to all hedgerows of 20 metres or more in length and to all hedgerows less than 20 metres in length which meet another hedgerow at each end. All hedgerows on, or adjoining land used for agriculture or forestry, the breeding and keeping of horses, ponies or donkeys, common land, village greens, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserves are included. Garden hedges are not affected and there are other exceptions.

What must I do before removing a hedge? If you want to remove a hedgerow you must send a hedgerow removal notice to the local planning authority. The notice must set out your reasons for wanting to remove it.

The strong presumption is that important hedgerows will be protected by a hedgerow retention notice unless circumstances justify its removal. The local planning authority cannot refuse hedge removal if the hedgerow is not important under the regulations.

The way in which the regulations apply to individual hedgerows is quite complex. Before formally seeking permission to remove a hedgerow, you are advised to discuss any plans to do so at an early stage with your local planning authority.