

### Renovating hedges

Appropriate trimming will maintain hedgerows in good condition for many years, but from time to time some restoration work is needed in order to encourage new growth at the base of a hedge and keep it thick, vigorous and stock-proof. Restoration of hedges takes three main forms: laying, gapping up or coppicing. Laying and coppicing have drastic effects on the structure of the hedge often as a result of hedges not being managed regularly, however medium and long term the hedge will be infinitely more valuable creating a more diverse ecosystem.

#### Laying

This is a traditional method of renovating hedges, which is usually carried out during the winter months (although very frosty weather should be avoided, particularly with big old hedges).

- A hedge to be laid should be allowed to grow up to a suitable height, i.e. 2.4 - 3.6m (8-12 ft). The hedge can be sided with the hedge trimmer during this time.
- Partially cut through each main stem and lay it down at an angle of about 30 degrees. The stems and stumps then re-sprout producing a dense barrier.
- Cut the stumps close to the ground and remove the heel of the stump. This will promote re-growth that will thicken the base of the hedge so that it can be laid again in the future.
- Stake and bind the newly laid hedge in the manner traditional to the area.
- A laid hedge may still need some temporary protective fencing against grazing stock, especially where stocking rates are high. This could be posts with a single strand of barbed wire, but where sheep are present, electric fencing or sheep net will be necessary.
- If the hedge is to be maintained by trimming, it should be allowed to re-grow for the first two years, or be trimmed very carefully to promote bushy growth in the base of the hedge and to establish the required shape. (All fences should be placed well back from the hedge - 1 metre minimum).



**Hedge rejuvenated for landscape, wildlife and to be stock-proof**

#### Gapping up

All gaps of over one metre long should be planted up to develop a continuous useful hedge. This can be done at the time of laying, or ideally 6 or more years before, so that the new plants will be ready to be laid into the hedge when required.



- Make sure the new plants receive sufficient light. If necessary cut back or coppice the hedge either side of the gap.
- New plants will need protection from stock, rabbits and weeds. Straw or black plastic can make good mulch.
- Larger plants than usual can be used, i.e. 60-90 cm whips, planted in a double staggered row giving 4 - 6 plants/metre (25cm (10") between rows).
- Gapping up can also provide an opportunity to diversify the species in the hedge or to establish young trees. Use locally occurring species and local provenance where possible. Blackthorn and holly are suitable where shade may be a problem.

## Coppicing

Hedge plants that have become very thick at the base (over 15cm) or have been badly laid in the past can be difficult to lay well. In such a case, coppicing may be best. Coppicing rejuvenates old plants and provides an opportunity to gap up the hedge without restricting light to the new plants. As with laying, this is best carried out in winter avoiding very frosty weather.

- Cut the hedge as low to the ground as possible, or to the previous level, whichever is lower.
- Trim the new growth for the next couple of years to encourage a dense structure.
- No weed control should be necessary as new growth should be vigorous enough to out-compete weeds.
- As with laid hedges, protection from grazing stock will be needed for 2-3 years. Protection may also be needed from rabbit grazing where local populations are high.
- Retain hedgerow trees and some dead wood where possible.
- Leave occasional 'standard' hawthorn and other trees.



**Newly coppiced hedgerow**