

the year, and is a good source of nectar and insects for birds in the spring. Birds usually take the berries, sloes, only after the first frosts have softened them.

Hazel *Corylus avellana* is slow growing, but valuable in a wildlife hedge. It supports a good variety of insects, and produces nuts in August-September. It grows in most conditions, but is best on chalky, rich, well-drained soils.

Holly *Ilex aquifolium* is a slow growing evergreen that can grow 15m (50ft) tall. Its prickly leaves provide good cover. It is useful in a wildlife hedge, although regular clipping can prevent fruiting so it may best be grown unchecked. Only female trees produce berries. It can be difficult to establish, so strong plants from a nursery are often best. It needs well-drained soil to do well, but is very tolerant, and will grow on most soils.

Beech *Fagus sylvatica* can easily be trained as a hedge, despite being a large tree when mature. As a hedge it retains its leaves all winter, providing a useful windbreak. A beech hedge does not produce seeds. It prefers chalk soils, but is tolerant of other conditions.

Lime *Tilia cordata* can grow into a large tree, but can easily be trained as a hedge. Being insect pollinated, it is a useful food plant for many birds.

Viburnum has two native varieties, *Viburnum lantana* (wayfaring tree) and *V. opulus* (guelder rose), which are best when space is not a problem. In a small garden you may prefer *V. compactum*. They flower early, and their nectar and pollen attract hoverflies and other insects. They grown best on chalky loams.

Crab apple *Malus sylvestris* is a small native tree, which can be incorporated into a wildlife hedge. Since it will flower and fruit better if not pruned regularly, it is best grown as a small hedgerow tree where space allows. It is an excellent source of insects. After the fruit are softened by frost, a variety of birds will eat them.

Privet is an under-rated evergreen shrub, which produces a good screen for privacy. The flowers are very good for butterflies. Use only the native privet, *Ligustrum vulgare*. The species commonly used for hedging is *L. ovalifolium*, which is very fast growing, may require pruning several times a season to keep it in trim, and does not produce berries.

Yew *Taxus baccata* is a slow-growing evergreen tree, readily trained to form a thick hedge. It provides good shelter and nesting sites, and a variety of birds eat the berries and their seeds. All parts of yew are poisonous to mammals, so it should not be planted where children or livestock may be affected. It is unlikely to fruit if clipped regularly. It cannot tolerate very acid soils, but does well on most other types.

Spindle *Euonymus europaeus* is a fast-growing shrub/small tree growing up to 2-6m (6-20ft). Useful in a wildlife hedge, it supports good quantities of insects, particularly aphids, and its fruit are eaten by a variety of birds. The berries are poisonous to mammals.

Non-native shrubs

Barberries All species of these thorny shrubs are suitable for a wildlife hedge, providing flowers, berries and secure nesting sites. They grow to 2-3m (6-10ft), but can easily be kept lower. There are both evergreen and deciduous varieties. *Berberis vulgaris*, *B. darwinii*, *B. stenophylla* and *B. thunbergii* are particularly good. They grow on all soil types, and provide thick cover and weed-free ground underneath.

Firethorns *Pyracantha* There are many varieties ranging 0.5-4m (2-11ft) high, and they grow well on all soils. They tolerate hard pruning, can be maintained at any height and trained to grow along a wall. Flowers in June attract insects, and red, orange or yellow berries ripen in late October. The best are the red- and orange-berried varieties – birds are very slow to eat the yellow ones. Firethorns are amongst the best berry producers, and recommended varieties include Mojave, Orange Glow, Red Cushion and Teton.

Cotoneasters are a large group of ornamental shrubs and trees and, with the exception only of *Cotoneaster conspicuus decorus* (birds ignore the berries), very valuable for wildlife. There are species of different heights and growth forms for almost any situation and soil type, and deciduous and evergreen kinds. Useful species include *Cotoneaster simondsii*, *C. horizontalis* and *C. salicifolius*. The flowers attract bees and the berries are eaten by a variety of birds, being a particular favourite of waxwings.

Ceanothus montana is a useful evergreen, whose flowers attract bees and other insects. It grows well in the correct situation, but needs shelter in colder areas.

Lavender *Lavandula spica* is a low shrub, which can be grown as a hedge by itself or mixed with **rosemary** *Rosmarinus officinalis*. Its maximum height is about 60cm (2ft), ideal where a very low hedge is desired. The flowers attract butterflies and bees, and seeds are taken by goldfinches.

Climbers

Dog rose *Rosa canina* is a useful deciduous plant. It requires fertile soil and good light. Its thorns help to improve the security of the hedge, and the fruit, which ripen in September, provide food for birds during winter. It is best pruned in February to encourage flowering.

Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* is a native, vigorous climber, useful in an established hedge. It prefers dry, acid loams with plentiful leafmould, although it grows on most soils. Hard pruning encourages thick bushy growth that makes ideal nesting sites and roosting cover.



Ivy

Ivy *Hedera helix* provides shelter for insects and early nest sites for birds. It thrives on poor soils, and climbs or carpets the ground, although it only flowers when it reaches light. Flowers attract insects in September and October, and the berries ripen in late winter when most others have been eaten. Allow it to grow only on solid walls, since it can damage loose masonry and rendering.

Clematis montana is a rampant climber that quickly provides a useful thicket for nesting, but can smother a hedge. Grow it in places where a hedge is not possible, such as cover on walls and on wooden and wire fences.

Planting a hedge

Prepare the soil thoroughly before planting anything. Make sure that bare-rooted whips do not dry out. Five minutes exposed to wind and direct sun is enough to kill some – keep them under a moist cloth or in a bucket of water during planting. Whips should be planted between October and March; container plants at any time.

First, peg out the hedge line. Remove the turf from an area 0.5-1 metre wide, depending on whether the hedge will have one or two rows. Dig a trench 30-40cm deep. Remove large stones, and all perennial weeds and their roots as you go and break up compacted areas. Use a fork to loosen compacted subsoil and, if needed, the soil on the sides of the trench. This encourages roots to grow farther out from the prepared trench. Enrich the soil with rotten manure, compost or any other organic matter. Unless the soil is very rich, add some balanced, slow-release fertiliser, preferably organic.

Lay down a marker line to ensure planting follows the desired line. The plants should be 30-45cm apart, depending on their size. Large vigorous plants may need to be 60cm apart. If you require a wide, dense hedge, plant the shrubs staggered in two rows, 30-45cm apart.

For each plant, dig a hole bigger than the rootball. Spread out the roots, and remove weeds and damaged roots. Put the plant in the hole, with the soil mark level with the surface of the ground. Fill with soil, and heel the plant firmly in. Cut back unwanted or damaged side shoots. Once the row is planted, fork over the ground lightly, add a layer of mulch and water thoroughly.

If the garden is visited by rabbits or deer, the newly planted hedge needs protection from browsing. You can use individual plastic plant tubes, or wire netting around each individual plant or to fence in the whole row.

Care of a new hedge

The newly planted hedge requires care until it is established. The plants are vulnerable to damage by wind, drought and severe weather for the first 2-3 years. It is important to keep the hedge free from rank grass and weeds for the first few years. A mulch,

plastic or old carpet along the hedge bottom can suppress weeds and reduce water loss in dry weather. This greatly enhances the survival of the plants. It will encourage growth of the lower branches and help to form a more solid hedge.

Pruning depends on how you want the hedge to look. Hard pruning of young plants encourages growth of lower branches, making the hedge dense from the base. Remove half of the height of the plants after planting and each winter remove at least half of the new season's growth. A less dense base provides a good site for wild flowers. For this, little or no pruning is needed at first.

Never plant climbers into a new hedge. Allow the hedge to establish first, otherwise the vigorous growth of the climbers can overcome the young shrubs. Once the hedge is old enough, climbing rose, dog rose, and honeysuckle can be planted.

It is worth planting wild flowers and other herbaceous plants along the bottom of an established hedge. These provide ground cover for birds such as wrens and dunnocks and food for a variety of birds. They also attract insects, including holly blue and other butterflies.

Small trees, such as hawthorn, crab apple and elder, are useful in a hedge. You can include them in a new hedge, or encourage them in an established one. Allow a strong shoot to develop unchecked from the top of the hedge, and remove sideshoots until the stem reaches the desired height. Then allow it to form a head. Such a miniature tree will produce more berries than several yards of hedge of the same species.

Maintaining a hedge

A mature hedge requires little attention except occasional trimming. Light pruning or trimming keeps it in shape and encourages healthy, dense growth. The best time for pruning, coppicing and laying is during January and early February – after birds have eaten the berries and before they start to nest. If possible, trim sections of hedge in alternate years to allow flowering and fruiting. Avoid cutting between March and August, which is when birds are nesting. Before you start trimming, check the hedge for nests, and if necessary delay trimming until the young have flown.

The sides of the hedge should taper slightly towards the top to allow light and rainwater to reach lower foliage and the ground at the base. An ideal cross section is a flat topped A. Cutting hedges at the same height and width every year can make the growing tips too woody, so losing their ability to produce new growth. Encourage a bushier and denser hedge by cutting at least 2cm above the previous year's growth. This keeps the hedge full of vigour and growth. It is easy to prune a hedge too heavily and lose the fruit. If berry-bearing shrubs require trimming in late summer or autumn, only trim back the current season's growth to leave the fruit exposed.



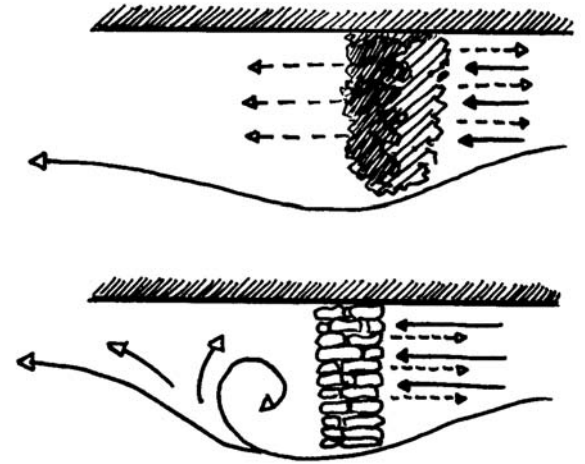
Rejuvenating old hedges

A hedge needs to be managed, or its wildlife value soon lessens. Most hedgerow plants grow to be trees if not pruned. As stems become leggy, the hedge loses its dense structure. Die-back creates unwanted gaps. Wrong pruning can make a hedge woody, sparse and lacking in vigour. Hard pruning, where stems are cut short, promotes vigorous growth and may revive plants with weak, congested growth. Another way to revitalise old hedges is coppicing. This involves cutting stems to within 10-15cm (4-6 inches) of the ground. Fresh growth from the base creates a dense hedge with correct trimming. Many hedging shrubs can also be laid. Get detailed advice before laying a hedge – it is easy to make mistakes.

Small gardens

Even small gardens can benefit from a hedge. Shrubs and climbers can be grown against walls to imitate a hedge where space is limited. Most provide cover for roosting and nesting birds, and can be pruned to fit the space available. Many shrubs such as hawthorn, and

A wall or fence produces damaging turbulence; a hedge softens the effect of wind and creates more shelter.



Gardens need shelter from winds and may need screening for privacy. The usual practice is to surround a garden with a fence. These are quick to erect and provide an instant boundary, but they have disadvantages. Being solid, a fence deflects the wind, which then comes down in a swirl on the leeward side, often damaging plants. Gardens 'sheltered' by fences can be windy and draughty, and the fences can be blown down by the wind. Hedges allow the wind to pass through, but slow it down. For every foot of hedge height, there are ten horizontal feet of shelter. Since plants on exposed sites suffer more from wind than from cold, the shelter created by a hedge can allow the cultivation of tender plants.

Planning a hedge

In gardens, hedges are often the most important feature for wildlife. To some extent, the value of the hedge is in the way it is managed, and in the hedging material used. Many hedges are of a single species, but one with many species is more attractive and better for birds. Hedges can provide insect food and an abundance of berries. An established thick hedge can provide ideal nesting and roosting sites, as well as cover from predators. It is likely to be the only hiding place in the garden. Hedge planting makes a valuable contribution to all kinds of wildlife, and your work will be rewarded when the hedge develops and the wildlife moves in.



INFORMATION Garden hedges



a million voices for nature

Make sure you choose plants that fit your local conditions. It helps to know your soil type, pH, moisture level, exposure to wind and sun, and extremes of hot and cold. Find out what plants grow in woodlands, hedgerows and other gardens near you – they are most likely to be best suited to your garden. Consult reference books, or get advice from a good nursery or mail order specialist on the requirements of each species. When selecting ornamentals be careful with varieties – some do not produce fruit. Varieties that horticulturists condemn for being susceptible to

are only suited to hedges up to 60cm (2ft) high. Hawthorn and beech can be maintained at 1-3m (3-10ft), or grown taller. Leyland cypress has been planted widely over the last 30 years as 'instant hedging'. Since it grows 1m (3ft) per year and can reach 45m (150ft), management problems outweigh advantages. A medium sized specimen will drain the moisture and nutrients from a 3 metre (10ft) radius. Its wildlife value is minimal, and most other plants are more beneficial.

The eventual height of the hedge is important in the choice of plants. For instance, rosemary and lavender are only suited to hedges up to 60cm (2ft) high.

Most hedges will be along boundaries, but if your garden is large enough, consider using them also as screening and as special features. Unless a hedge follows a linear boundary, you don't have to plant it in a straight line. By planting a crescent or s-shaped hedge, you can create a more diverse micro-habitat for wildlife.

In short, any shrub that will stand being clipped can be trained to form a hedge. Most native trees can be hedged, although generally they don't bear fruit when cut back regularly. If a mixed hedge composition is selected with care, it can grow to become at least the equal of a field hedge in the variety of flora and fauna associated with it.

A hedge is a permanent feature, so careful planning is needed to choose the location, eventual height and species composition of the hedge. The best hedges contain several species that come into leaf, flower and fruit at different times, enhancing their wildlife value. Native broad-leaved species are often best, but several ornamental shrubs are valuable for wildlife. There is no disadvantage in using shrubs that need pruning at different times, providing that none requires it during the nesting season.

enjoyment of their dwelling and/or garden. This regulation only applies to garden hedges over 2m in height, and only if a neighbour complains about the hedge and the complaint is upheld by the local authority.

Further reading

- Gardening for Wildlife* by George Pilkington, published by Alfresco Books, 1999
- Birdfeeder Guide* by Robert Burton, published by Dorling Kindersley, 2003
- The Garden Bird Book* by David Glue, published by Macmillan, 1982
- The Bird Table Book* by Tony Soper, published by David & Charles, 2006
- Birdfeeder Garden* by Robert Burton, published by Dorling Kindersley, 1998
- How to Make a Wildlife Garden* by Chris Baines, published by Frances Lincoln, 2000

The RSPB

UK Headquarters, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. Telephone 01767 693690
Northern Ireland Headquarters, Belvoir Park Forest, Belfast BT8 7QT. Telephone 028 9049 1547
Scotland Headquarters, 25 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3TP. Telephone 0131 311 6500
Wales Headquarters, Sutherland House, Castlebridge, Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff CF11 9AB. Telephone 029 2035 3000
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Illustrations by Mike Langman & Dan Powell

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Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* is often grown as a mixed hedge with hawthorn, and forms an impenetrable hedge when well established. It flowers very early in

Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* is a prime native hedgerow shrub, worth including in most hedges. It is fast growing, tough, tolerates hard pruning and forms a dense hedge if pruned correctly or laid. It grows well except on very acid or very wet soils and is tolerant of air pollution. It supports one of the best insect communities of all native shrubs and trees, providing valuable food for birds in late spring/early summer. The haws ripen in August and many birds relish them. The thorny stems provide good protection for nesting birds. Unpruned, it forms an attractive small tree. Since hawthorn flowers and fruits only on old growth, hedge trimming needs to be carried out very carefully, and preferably only on alternate years.

Native shrubs

When planting native species, make sure they come from British grown stock. Many hedgerow species, especially hawthorn, are imported from eastern Europe and may have been taken from the wild. Non-native varieties flower at different times and are more susceptible to mildew than our native strains.

The best source of plants and information is usually your local tree nursery, a mail order specialist or a garden centre. Hedging plants are available both as bare-rooted whips and as container-grown plants. Ensure that the plants have an extensive root system. Whips are much cheaper and harder.

Today, a bewildering array of trees and shrubs is available for the gardener to choose from. The following list gives suggestions for good plants for a wildlife hedge, though the list is by no means exhaustive. There are plenty of other trees and shrubs that provide food and/or suitable habitat, and you may wish to experiment. Whichever you choose, make sure they are right for the purpose – that the variety (not only the species) is beneficial for wildlife, the plant is right for the soil conditions and can easily be maintained at the desired height.

What to plant

attack by caterpillars or birds are often the best for a wildlife garden.

the smaller cotoneasters and pyracanthas can be kept small and provide a valuable source of berries. Climbers (honeysuckle, clematis and ivy are particularly good) and slim-growing shrubs such as the prostrate *Cotoneaster horizontalis* can be trained up a fence. The low growing lavender, rosemary and box are other good options for a small garden.

The law and garden hedges

Spare a thought for your neighbours when planning a hedge. Hedges generate many disputes and disagreements between neighbours. These are mainly about the size and tidiness of the hedge, and about cutting the hedge, particularly in the breeding season.

Nesting birds: It is an offence under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 intentionally to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built. It will be an intentional act, for example, if you or your neighbour know there is an active nest in the hedge, and still cut the hedge, damaging or destroying the nest in the process.

Hedges: A boundary hedge is usually the joint responsibility of both neighbours. Both must agree on major work, including removal, coppicing or laying. In theory, you need your neighbour's agreement even before trimming the hedge. If the hedge is just inside your neighbour's garden, they own it; you only have the right to trim any part that encroaches over your boundary line. Your neighbour should ask for your permission for access to trim the hedge on your property. Regardless of ownership, no-one can trim or cut a hedge if the action damages active birds' nests, and hence violates the Wildlife and Countryside Act. If tall hedges or trees put your garden in the shade, you can cut off branches that overhang your boundary. You can also prune back roots that invade your property, even if this is detrimental to the plant. You don't have the right to cut down vegetation on your neighbour's property, or apply weedkiller to destroy the plants.

High hedges: Part 8 of the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003 gives a local authority the powers to force the owner of a high evergreen or semi-evergreen hedge to reduce the hedge height, if the said hedge is shown to significantly reduce the neighbours'