

Supporting guidance for Coppicing of Hedges

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Coppicing, as with laying, is used to rejuvenate hedges and extend their lifespan by encouraging new, healthy stems to grow from the cut stumps (stools). Unlike hedge laying all the old growth is cut and removed, and this cut material could potentially form part of a biofuel management system.

What needs to be done

Coppicing is most appropriate where it's not necessary or possible to create a livestock-proof hedge, or the plants are not in a suitable condition or form to be laid. You may also wish to coppice bushes adjacent to newly-planted sections to prevent the established bushes from over-shading new saplings. You may also need to replant where coppiced stumps have failed to re-grow.

The [Hedgerow Management Cycle](#) guide shows the stages in the hedge management cycle where coppicing may be needed. Avoid coppicing very long continuous lengths of hedgerow in any one year as this will result in a dramatic loss of habitat.

Coppicing involves cutting the main stem as close to the ground as possible. Make clean cuts, and angle them to shed water.

Coppice during spells of mild weather in winter. In Scotland, older hedges tend to respond best to coppicing when the sap starts to rise in February.

Lightly trim new growth one or two years after coppicing to encourage side-growth and a dense structure. The aim is to achieve a bushy structure arising from the base of the hedge. Allow the hedge to develop to a minimum width of two metres and minimum of height of 1.5 metres, but ideally taller and wider than this. Leaving occasional plants to develop into tall bushes or hedgerow trees adds to the diversity of the hedge.

You may need to fence the hedge to prevent livestock, deer, rabbits or voles from browsing the re-growth.

You shouldn't need to apply herbicides, apart from around new planting, as the coppiced plants should out-compete other vegetation for water and nutrients. However, in the first year you may need to prevent vegetation from smothering the new growth. This can be done quite quickly by hand using a grass-hook. Take care not to disturb nesting birds. We recommend you do not strim or mow vegetation at the base of the hedge because this risks cutting the hedge re-growth.

Further information

- [Hedgelink – UK Hedgerow Biodiversity Action Group](#)
- [The National Hedge-laying Society](#)
- [RSPB – hedgerows](#)
- [Scottish Association of Independent Farm Conservation Advisors](#)