

Supporting guidance for Laying of Hedges

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The main aim of hedge laying is usually to retain or create a livestock-proof barrier, whilst encouraging new, healthy stems from the base of the hedge.

There are no regional styles of hedge-laying in Scotland, as there are in England and Wales.

The style used should be appropriate for its role, the farm and local landscape. The English 'Midland' style is widely considered the standard and is most suitable for mixed farms. Styles such as the 'Lancashire and Westmorland' 'Northumberland' and 'South of England' are more suitable for grassland farms.



'Single brush' Midland (Leicestershire) style of hedge-laying with top growth kept to one side of the line of stakes – Credit: Tony Seymour – © TFE 2014



'Double brush' south of England style of hedge-laying with top growth on both sides of the line of stakes – Credit: Tony Seymour – © TFE 2014

The [Hedgerow Management Cycle](#) guide shows the stages in the hedge management cycle when hedge laying is likely to be needed.

Hedges suitable for laying must be sufficiently tall (2.5–5 metres high) with stems approximately 5–10 centimetres thick at the base.

Hedge laying should be done during spells of mild weather between 1 September and 31 March. If undertaking hedge laying in March, please check that no birds have started nesting. If you do find nesting birds, work must stop and resume in the autumn. In Scotland, older hedges tend to respond best to laying when the sap starts to rise in February.

Hedge laying cycles vary depending on the species, height, growing conditions, growth-rate and intervening management. Newly planted hedges should not be laid until the hedge has grown to at least two metres in height. A 10–20 year cycle should be considered for established hedges.

Leave occasional plants to develop into hedgerow trees to add to the diversity of the hedge.

Gaps which are unlikely to be filled by laying may need to be planted up. You may also need to replant where stumps fail to re-grow.

New growth should be lightly trimmed one or two years after laying to encourage side-growth, and a dense structure. Trim in the same direction as the hedge was laid.



Three metre tall young hedge being laid – Credit: Tony Seymour – © TFE 2014

It should not be necessary to apply herbicides, apart from around new planting, as the laid plants should out-compete other vegetation for water and nutrients. However, in the first year it may be necessary to prevent vegetation from smothering the new growth. This may be done, quite quickly by hand using a grass-hook. Take care not to disturb nesting birds. Do not strim or mow vegetation at the base of the hedge because this risks cutting the hedge regrowth.



Laid stems and young re-growth from the stumps – Credit: Tony Seymour – © TFE 2014



Hedge-laying training on the Isle of Bute – Credit: Tony Seymour – © TFE 2014

[Further information](#)

- [The National Hedge-laying Society](#)
- [RSPB – hedgerows](#)
- [Scottish Association of Independent Farm Conservation Advisors](#)