Climate School 180

Hedge Planting

Introduction

The benefits to planting a hedge within your school grounds are many and varied. As well as a valuable wildlife resource, hedge planting can help divide up large areas, define spaces, create shelter and provide a source of natural, loose materials for play. Planning, planting and maintaining a hedgerow also offers a variety of cross curricular links when taking learning outdoors. Planting a hedgerow is also a great way to help mitigate the effects of climate change. Easily planted by children, hedge planting in school grounds:



Moderates temperature and helps to reduce wind speed.



Supports a wealth of biodiversity and plays an important role in a balanced ecosystem.



Reduces the risk of water run off and subsequent flooding.



Captures and stores CO^2, one of the key greenhouse gases.



Improves air quality by capturing pollutants and reducing noise pollution.

Making the change

- **Plan**

Identifying why you want to plant a hedge will have an impact on the type of plant species chosen, as well as the location.

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A mixed species hedge will provide year-round interest, including flowers in spring. They support biodiversity too, providing a habitat and a source of food for a variety of birds, mammals and insects. Hedges can be combined with trees to form ‘tredges’.



A **Beech hedge**, with its green leaves in summer and copper leaves in the autumn, will retain its leaves well into the winter, making it a useful species for dividing up large areas or defining spaces (for example a social seating area).



Evergreen species, for example Conifers, can be planted along a boundary bordering a main road, providing screening and helping to filter pollutants, therefore contributing to improved air quality within the grounds.



Willow is a flexible plant species that can be bent and secured to create a natural barrier (a ‘fedge’) and interesting shapes, such as an archway. A fast-growing species, willow can be planted in wet areas to help suck up water, but it should not be planted too close to buildings as the roots can cause problems long term.



Brash hedging is another great way to define spaces, laying cut branches horizontally between wooden stakes to create a natural barrier. As well as providing a good opportunity to recycle cut branches, dead wood is a very valuable habitat source for many insects and minibeasts.

- **Prepare**

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Once you have measured the length of the space you wish to plant, calculate the number of plants you will need. In general, four to six plants per metre is a good rule of thumb.

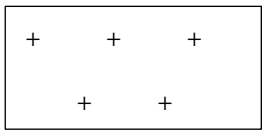
If you source bare root trees, ensure the soil stays moist by covering the roots with soil until needed and then standing the trees in a bucket of water on the day of planting. Undertake a tools safety talk with pupils. Simple tips like ensuring there is enough space for planting, keeping one foot on the ground and using the ball of your other foot on the spade and agreeing a location for tools when not in use will help avoid accidents.

It is also possible to create a hedge by planting a single row in long, low raised beds. This may be necessary in, for example, a tarmac school grounds bordering a main road where improving air quality and reducing the impact of traffic noise is a priority.

- **Plant**

If you purchase tree species in pots, then planting can take place at any time of year. If you purchase bare root plants, then planting needs to take place over the winter months (between November and the end of March).

Hedging plants can either be planted in a single row or in a double row. If planting in a double row, plant four to six trees in staggered lines.



A double row of plants will grow into a thicker hedge over time.
If planting bare root species into grass, remove turf and dig a trench to a depth that will accommodate the root ball of the trees. Then backfill with the soil and press back in firmly with your foot.

You need to dig a hole slightly larger than the pot the plant is in. Work together in small teams, where one pupil holds the tree species upright whilst another backfills with soil and secures the tree by carefully firming the soil around the base with their feet.

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Whether you have bare-rooted or in a pot, young plants may need some support, particularly in a windy position. You can use some garden canes pressed into the soil and the plants tied to them. This support will need removing in a year or two.

Remember to break up any large lumps of soil and turn pieces of grass turf upside down so the grass decomposes and adds nutrients back into the soil.

Water all new planting regularly over time as the plants establish, and especially during extended periods of dry weather.

Alert the grounds maintenance team within your local authority to the presence of the new hedge to avoid any likelihood of mower damage when the grass is cut. You may want to put in a temporary rope fence with signs on to alert everyone to the importance of not damaging the new plants.

- **Protect**

Spread bark chippings or lay mulch mat around the base of the trees. This helps reduce weed growth and, therefore, the competition for soil nutrients.
Ideally, it is good practice to protect your new hedge with fencing whilst the trees establish. This, however, has a cost implication so using chippings or mulch mats will help highlight the presence of young trees to the contractors who mow the grass. Involving pupils in creating suitable signage is also a great way to raise awareness of the new trees.

If rabbits or deer are likely to visit your grounds, make use of tree guards to protect the trees as they grow. Biodegradable and recycled tree guards are now widely available.

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- **Management and maintenance**

Monitor the growth of your hedge over time and ensure the grass around the base of the trees does not grow long whilst the trees are still young. Water during extended periods of dry weather.

Once the trees are established, consider sowing wildflower seed around the base of your hedge and request that a half metre strip of grass from the base of your hedge is not mown between April and September.

Undertake litter picks when needed to remove any litter trapped around the base of the hedge or between plants.

Pruning a deciduous hedge will become an important job every other year once the hedge reaches the height you wish to maintain. Undertake any pruning over the winter months when the trees are dormant, and you are unlikely to disturb nesting birds.
Conifer species will need pruning twice a year, once in the spring and once in the autumn.

In general, an informal hedge within your school grounds will just need dead or diseased branches removing and any excessive growth cut back to the height you wish to maintain.

Alternative hedges



With regards to a willow fedge, work with the pupils to weave in long stems in September and October each year to help maintain shape, or cut stems off in November when the leaves have dropped. Cut willow can be planted elsewhere in your grounds as a sustainable resource that can be used in the future, for example to replace dead stems in your main fedge if required. Do not be afraid of cutting hard or bending willow – it is incredibly resilient and will grow exceptionally fast back from any pruning you do.

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As brash hedging is created using dead wood, and the dead wood will decompose over time, it may be necessary to add more branches and cut wood to your structure to maintain the natural barrier and valuable wildlife habitat.



If more information is needed, simple guidance to hedge pruning is available online through relevant organisations such as The Woodland Trust www.woodlandtrust.org.uk and the Royal Horticultural Society www.rhs.org.uk In addition, a free school grounds maintenance support booklet can be downloaded from LtL here https://ltl.org.uk/resources/pollination-maintenance-guide/

Whatever form your hedge takes, if labour support is needed to help with maintenance over time, consider involving the wider community through contacting a volunteer group (for example The Conservation Volunteers www.tcv.org.uk) a local community group or a local allotment group.

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