

HEDGES: CUTTING, PRUNING & TRIMMING



Established hedges require trimming to keep them growing well and dense. They provide wildlife-friendly boundaries for your garden. Formal hedges can often require more frequent trimming than informal hedges.

Knowing how to cut hedges can be tricky but keeping them well-maintained will help you create a soft garden boundary. This beginners' guide on cutting, pruning and trimming hedges will ensure a beautiful garden hedge all year round.



WHY HEDGE SHAPE IS IMPORTANT

The shape of your hedge can have a very big impact on the health of the hedging as it establishes. Whilst you may wish for a perfectly clipped square topiary hedge often seen in formal gardens, they are often not practical. Most gardens do not have enough open space to accommodate a square finish hedge or the sunlight levels to keep it healthy.

Whereas, a hedge that is slightly narrower at the top than at the bottom can have a big impact on keeping it healthy. If the top is not thinner than the bottom of the hedge, the bottom will often receive less sunlight. This results in lush growth on the top of the hedge and a weak hedge at the bottom. This design can also protect the hedge from snowfall as it will not build weight at the top that will crush the branches as the snow will slide off first.

WHEN TO CUT YOUR HEDGE

We have added a calendar below to guide you as to when to cut your hedging:

- May – Viburnum tinus
- May to September, every few weeks – privet, hedging honeysuckle
- June and August – hawthorn
- July or August – Buxus (box hedge). It is important that Buxus does not dry out when it is clipped. On very hot days don't start cutting until the evening once it temperature cools down
- July, August or the beginning of September – hornbeam (Carpinus betulus)
- August – holly (Ilex)
- August or September – Elaeagnus, yew (Taxus baccata)
- September or October – beech (Fagus sylvatica)

TOOLS REQUIRED



Before you can start trimming, pruning and cutting your hedging it is important to have the correct equipment. Make sure any electric or petrol-powered tools are in good working order and have been serviced before using. The below tools are useful when cutting hedges:

- Electric hedge cutters
- Manual hedge cutters or shears
- Rake or brush
- Canes and string
- A bucket/wheelbarrow
- Gloves
- Protective equipment such as goggles or steel toe-capped boots

Looking after tools

For any tool used in gardening, it is essential to look after them and keep them sharp. Rather than putting them straight into storage after using them, it is often best to care for them before and after every use. Oiling your garden tools can prevent rust and keep them in good working order. Hedging shears will need to be sharpened after every use. However, electric trimmers don't need as much sharpening but do require a good clean and oil to keep them functioning for many years.

Step-by-step

Top Tip!

Watch out for birds' nests. The main nesting season is early March to late July, but it can be longer, so take care to not damage any birds' nests. In accordance with Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, it is an offence to damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built.



1. Make a line using a string held firmly between two canes to act as a cutting guide before trimming.
2. Using shears or a hedge trimmer, lightly trim the new growth to keep the hedge in shape.
3. If you use a power trimmer it is important to check the sides are being cut evenly. Look along the hedge as you work, stepping back every so often to check the overall shape.
4. Keep your blades flat so that you don't dig into the hedge. If you are using a power trimmer, cut in an arch from the bottom up.
5. Try and cut your hedge so that the bottom is slightly wider than the top. This allows light to reach all sides of the hedge.
6. Rake up or collect any cuttings and add them to your compost heap.
7. Apply a 5cm layer of mulch around the base of the hedge, leaving a mulch-free collar around the stems. This will keep the roots moist and help prevent weed growth.

Tidying hedge trimmings

It is not necessary to use tarpaulin to catch hedge clippings. You can opt for a brush and dustpan or a lawnmower to collect any trimmings. The only situation where a tarpaulin would be useful is clipping a formal parterre or knot garden into gravel.

Nearly all other hedgerow material can be composted, except for Hawthorn and Pyracanthas hedges which have vicious sharp thorns. If you're composting evergreen leaves or larger hedge leaves then we recommend mowing over them on the lawn to help cut them up further. Then add them to your compost bin where they will break down considerably faster.