

Hedge Rejuvenation

Objective:

To improve and fill in hedges that have been damaged or mismanaged so that the structure of the hedge is enhanced, improving biodiversity and carbon storage. The stock proof element and shelter for animals will be improved by this measure.

Background:

Hedgerows are an important habitat in the Irish landscape. Hedges have a wide range of benefits including shelter for both livestock and crops, biodiversity through producing seeds and pollen and nesting habitats, water filtration, carbon sequestration and wildlife corridors.

A good quality hedge will be greater than 1.8 metres in height and have a wide base with a mixture of species to extend pollen and nectar season and it will contain some mature trees to improve biodiversity.

Site Suitability

- This action can only be selected on parcels with an Eligible hectare > 0.
- This action is available on CP and Non-CP LPIS parcels that will be claimed by the participant for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
- On CP Parcels, this action can only be selected on fields with the following scorecards assigned/submitted: Grassland, Rough Grazing, Coastal, Winterage, Peatland, Corncrake or Chough.
- In Non-CP parcels this action is not available on areas that are SAC/SPAs, NHAs, pNHAs, Annex 1 Grasslands or Breeding Wader Hotspots.

Note 3: External farm boundaries CANNOT be entered for this action and will not be paid unless the external farm boundary adjoins a public road, watercourse or water body. You must have control of both sides of the hedgerow for ongoing maintenance.

Note 4: Where an investment has been grant aided under TAMS or any other National/EU funded Agri-environment or Capital investment Scheme from 01 January 2018, this cannot fulfil part of the requirement for this ACRES NPI action.

Fencing-Barbed Wire, Fencing- Permanent Electric or Fencing-Sheep Wire NPIs cannot be used to fulfil the fencing requirement of this ACRES NPI.

Requirements:

1. The location and lengths selected for this NPI must be identified on the selected LPIS parcels and marked on the map submitted. A minimum 10 metres must be delivered. Each length applied for is only eligible for one NPI payment and once claimed must be maintained for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
2. Coppicing or laying works must only be carried out between the 1st of September and the 28th of February.
3. Laying cannot be carried out by use of heavy machinery.

4. If there are gaps present (that won't be filled by regrowth from the laying or the coppicing of the hedgerow), infilling must take place at four plants per metre.
5. Plants must be of Irish origin or Irish provenance. All plants purchased for infilling must be purchased from DAFM registered professional operators, have accompanying plant passports and participants must ensure that they retain the plant passport(s) and receipts(s). Any plants that die must be replaced during the dormant season. See Table 3. for hedgerow species for infilling.
6. All newly laid or coppiced hedgerows in a grass or tillage field must be protected from livestock with a permanent fence from the time the works are completed. However, where the laid/coppiced hedgerow bounds a private laneway, public road or watercourse, fencing is not required on the lane/road or waterbody side as long as the hedgerow is not being damaged by livestock.
7. Grass and competing vegetation must be controlled.
8. The newly rejuvenated hedge must be maintained and protected for the remainder of the contract.

Table 3. Tree and Shrub species suitable for infill planting.

Hedgerow species for infilling
Blackthorn (<i>Prunus spinosa</i>)
Dog Rose (<i>Rosa canina</i>)
Guelder Rose (<i>Viburnum opulus</i>)
Hawthorn/Whitethorn (<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>)
Hazel (<i>Corylus avellana</i>)
Holly (<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>)
Spindle (<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>)
Alder Buckthorn (<i>Frangula alnus</i>)

Additional Guidance:

Coppicing:

- A hedge with gaps, with too few stems to lay, too large to lay (>15cm diameter) or too short (less than 2.5 metres tall) can be coppiced.
- It is important to cut as low to the ground as possible, just above the soil to produce new shoots. A circular saw can bring down the height of the hedge but after that the vegetation will have to be cleared with a slash hook and the stump cut down to 4-6cm using a small chainsaw.
- Compostable film over the cut stumps may be considered as vegetation management is important for the coppiced hedgerow to develop.

Hedgerow laying:

- Hedges that are established but are thin at the base with minimum 1 stem for every half meter that are on average 3-10cm diameters can be laid with any gaps being infilled.
- Hedge laying is a skilled craft. If works are not carried out by a professional, attendance at a specialist training course is advised, contact the CP team for more information.

- Method for laying a hedgerow:
- Stems are cut at the base 70-80% of the way through keeping the cuts as low as possible to the ground.
- A long thin hinge allows this stem to be twisted and best positioned to lay it over, ideally at an angle of 45 degrees and always running up a slope. The laid stems are woven into the ones previously laid to knit together.
- Very important the heel or stub is cut off at a sloping angle near the ground to encourage regrowth from the ground and allow water run-off.
- Laid stems should be secured to prevent rocking and damage from strong winds especially on exposed sites. Cut stems are secured to posts driven into the hedge bank interwoven with suitable rods (hazel/willow).
- Make the cuts in the stems higher up to form the hedgerow into the shape you want, and this will also cause regeneration from these points.
- Always lay the stems uphill to get better transpiration and ensure the hedge lives.
- Don't lay hedgerows directly down on the line of the cut base. Roll the stems back slightly from the ground cuts to allow light in which will encourage better rejuvenation at the cuts.
- Trim regrowth after 3 or 4 years if getting a lot of vertical growth but light trim the top only.

Infilling:

- Infilling with light whips is difficult as they do not compete well with the existing root structure. It is advisable to infill with stronger plants to ensure survival.

General:

- It is recommended to avail of specialist training prior to undertaking hedge rejuvenation.
- Species selection should be guided by what is growing at similar locations on the farm or nearby sites. Use the opportunity to increase the species diversity in the hedge.
- If cutting, you should not cut all hedges on the farm in any one year. It is good practice to cut on a minimum 3-year cycle leaving at least one third of the hedgerows uncut each year.
- It is advisable to cut the hedges in an 'A' shape which allows the base and the sides to receive more light resulting in a denser structure valuable for wildlife.