



FALTA SCEACH NA GAILLIMHE



THE HEDGEROWS OF GALWAY



The value of native hedgerows



Native hedgerows are a haven for wildlife within the County Galway countryside. They form corridors that allow animals, big and small, to move through the landscape, while also providing much-needed food and shelter for wildlife. Hedges also provide a refuge for woodland plants and animals in a county where woodland cover is low. From a distance hedges might seem unlikely wildlife hotspots but

up close you will find they are teeming with life.

Hedgerows also enhance the scenic appearance of the landscape. Imagine an Irish rural landscape devoid of hedgerows! Hedgerows are part of our historical, cultural and natural heritage, and help create a sense of place.



Photo Copyright Dave Ruffles

Hedgerows provide shelter and screening for housing, helping to reduce heating bills and to create privacy. Native hedgerows can form excellent and highly attractive boundaries for houses, even in larger developments and estates. They are an environmentally-friendly alternative to concrete block boundary walls.

The primary function of hedgerows is an agricultural one. They define field boundaries and act as stock-proof enclosures. Hedges provide shelter from wind for stock and crops. They also help prevent the spread of airborne disease, regulate water movement and help prevent flooding.

Hedgerows are living boundaries that should be actively conserved.



Galway's hedgerows: results of a county-wide survey

The main aim of County Galway hedgerow survey was to determine the composition, structure and management status of native hedgerows in Galway, and to propose recommendations for hedgerow conservation and management.

Hedgerow extent	Galway has an extensive network of hedgerows with an estimated length of over 23000 km! This network is concentrated mainly in the east of the county.
Hedgerow shrubs	At least twenty eight types of shrubs or trees were recorded in the shrub or hedge layer of the hedges sampled indicating the variety and potential diversity of hedgerows in Galway. Hawthorn is by far the most common species found in hedges in Galway as it is in many other parts of the country. Other commonly occurring shrubs include blackthorn, elder, holly, hazel, spindle and privet. Gorse and willow are more abundant in wetter and upland areas. In the west of the county, the beautiful shrub Fuchsia, which is native to Chile, is common in places where it was formerly planted and has spread vegetatively.
Hedgerow trees	Ash and hawthorn are the most common hedgerows trees found in Galway. Hedgerow trees are great for wildlife and help give the impression that the landscape is much more wooded than it really is.
Hedgerow climbers	Woody climbing plants are also regularly found in Galway hedges such as ivy, bramble, honeysuckle and wild rose. These climbers add to the floristic diversity of the hedgerow and provide additional sources of food for wildlife.
Hedgerow structure	The majority of hedgerows in Galway are relatively tall (>1.5m), wide (>1m) and bushy and therefore very good for wildlife because they provide cover and fruit prolifically. Many hedgerows, however, do not have dense growth at their base and are quite gappy thus reducing their wildlife value somewhat.
Hedgerow management status	Many hedgerows in Galway appear not to have been managed for some time or are poorly managed. An increase in the quality and quantity of management would greatly improve the ecological and agricultural value of the hedgerows in Galway, and ensure long-term sustainability of the hedgerow resource.

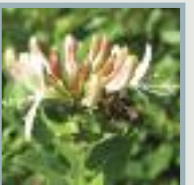


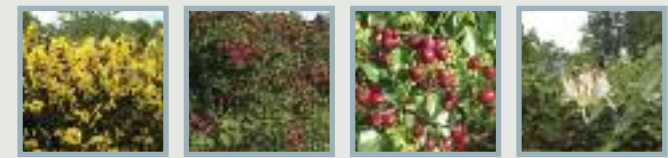


Table 1: The main types of shrubs and trees found in County Galway hedgerows

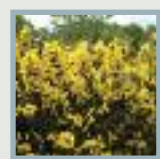
Common name	Scientific name
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>
Gorse	<i>Ulex species</i>
Willow	<i>Salix species</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>
Spindle	<i>Euonymus europaeus</i>
Privet	<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>
Crab apple	<i>Malus sylvestris</i>
Sycamore*	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Wild cherry	<i>Prunus avium</i>
Snowberry*	<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>
Gooseberry*	<i>Ribes uva-crispa</i>
Box*	<i>Lonicera nitida</i>
Guelder rose	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>
Birch	<i>Betula species</i>
Elm	<i>Ulmus species</i>
Damson*	<i>Prunus domestica</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Fuchsia*	<i>Fuchsia magellanica</i>
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>

*Non-native plants



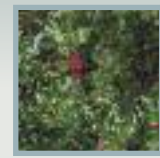
Five native hedgerow types or groups occur in County Galway.



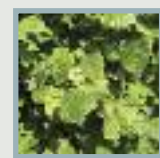
**Group 1:
Gorse-dominated hedges**
These hedgerows are commonly found in areas with marginal soils, usually acidic and often at higher elevations, often with willow, hawthorn an/or elder.



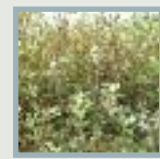
**Group 2:
Species-poor hawthorn hedges**
This variable and widespread group often includes one other species such as blackthorn or elder.



**Group 3:
Hedges characterized by the presence of holly**
The relatively species-rich hedges in this group are generally made up of hawthorn, blackthorn, holly, elder, ash and/or privet and are more common in the east of the county.



**Group 4:
Hedges characterized by the presence of hazel and/or spindle**
These hedges are similar to Group 3 but tend to include hazel and/or spindle and are generally slightly less species rich.



**Group 5:
Willow-dominated hedgerows on wet ground**
Hedgerows in this group tend to be dominated by willow species and to a lesser extent, hawthorn. Gorse, blackthorn and privet may also be present.

In order to ensure the long-term sustainability and conservation of the hedgerow resource in Galway, the main issues that need to be addressed in Galway are lack of appropriate management and awareness of the value of hedgerows.

Hedgerows under threat

Throughout the country and in Galway, hedgerows are being cleared at an alarming rate to make way for one-off housing, larger

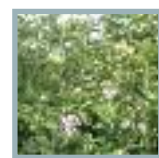
housing developments, gas pipelines and road schemes. They have also been removed in some areas to allow for agricultural intensification. In others, lack of appropriate management is leading to their demise.



Hedgerows are part of Ireland's natural, cultural, historical and archaeological heritage and identity, and therefore should be valued and protected.

Hedgerow conservation recommendations

1. Species- rich hedgerows (often townland boundaries or road-side hedges) should be prioritised for conservation.
2. Roadside hedgerows frame the countryside for all road users and increase the scenic value of the landscape and, therefore, should be retained in new developments. Where they have to be removed, new native hedgerows should be planted elsewhere.
3. Nurseries and garden centres in county Galway should be encouraged to stock native trees and shrubs of local provenance.
4. Appropriate hedgerow management is essential for the conservation of a sustainable hedgerow resource.





Hedgerow management guidelines

1. Hedgerows should be cut on their sides and shaped roughly into an A-shape but leaving the top to grow free-form.
2. Hedge height should not be reduced below 1.5 metres.
3. Hedgerows should be trimmed in rotation approximately every three years. Annual trimming may be required in some locations for road safety reasons.
4. Tree saplings in hedgerows should be retained where possible to increase the level of trees in hedgerows in Galway.
5. Native species, preferably of local provenance, should be used for planting new hedgerows.
6. Invasive species in hedgerows (e.g. Rhododendron, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed) should be controlled.



Useful websites

Galway County Council www.galway.ie	The Tree Council www.treecouncil.ie
People and Nature Project www.galway.ie/en/Services/Heritage/BiodiversityProject	
Crann www.crann.ie	ENFO www.enfo.ie
The Heritage Council www.heritagecouncil.ie	Teagasc www.teagasc.ie
National Parks and Wildlife Service www.npws.ie	Irish Seed Savers Association www.irishseedsavers.ie

Hedges and the law

The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 actually prohibits the cutting of hedgerows during the critical bird-nesting period in spring and summer (1st March to 31st August) because of the devastating impact on nesting birds and other wildlife.



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Janice Fuller



Galway County Council
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