

# Mechanical Hedgerow-Cutting Guidance

## for County Galway\*



## Values of Hedgerows

- Hedgerows have huge value for wildlife because they provide food and shelter for numerous birds and small mammals.
- Hedgerows are a much-loved feature of the Irish landscape and contribute to the beauty of the countryside.
- Hedgerows help prevent soil erosion and are part of the natural flood control capacity of landscapes.
- Hedgerows form stock-proof boundaries and therefore are important for farmers and landowners.



*An initiative of Galway County Council and part funded by National Biodiversity Action Plan*



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe  
Galway County Council



An Roinn  
Cultúir, Oidhreachta agus Gaeltachta  
Department of  
Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht

# Hedgerow Management

---

Things to consider prior to hedge-cutting:

1. What are the objectives of hedgerow management? Road safety, pedestrian access, management of farm or boundaries etc. This will inform how a hedge is managed in terms of the frequency and type of cutting.
2. What machinery is most appropriate? Are the hedgerows old and mature with large stems or young hedges? Survey the hedgerow prior to cutting and ensure you have the correct machinery to suit the structure of the hedge.
3. Are any invasive species present in the hedgerow e.g. Japanese knotweed? If there are invasive species present, or you suspect there are, do not cut and report to the Invasive Species Working Group in Galway County Council at [invasivespecies@galwaycoco.ie](mailto:invasivespecies@galwaycoco.ie) and the Area Engineer. For further information on invasive species see <https://biodiversity.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/invasive-species/knotweeds>

## Timing

---

Cut hedgerows from September to February inclusive. There are some exemptions but ensure they apply to the work you are carrying out.

It is illegal to cut hedgerows during the bird nesting season i.e. 1st March to 31st August inclusive <https://www.npws.ie/legislation/irish-law/restrictions-cutting-hedgerows>

## Shape

---

- Side-trim the hedgerow to a triangular profile, sloping the sides to form a wide base and narrow top. This allows light to reach the base of the hedge.
- Allow the top of the hedgerow to grow free if possible. The taller and bushier the hedgerow, the better it is for wildlife.
- Hedgerows that are cut hard into a box shape are favoured by some land-owners but they offer very little for wildlife because they tend produce few flowers and fruit. Tall, bushy hedges are preferable because they provide shelter for livestock and wildlife.

## Level of Cut

---

Cut stems a little above the last cut where possible, leaving up to 12mm of new growth. Almost all new growth comes from within a few centimetres of the cut. This will help produce a vigorous hedgerow, which is good for wildlife and maintaining a hedgerow as a stock-proof boundary.

## Trees in Hedgerows

---

- Retain mature trees and tall shrubs as well as occasional young trees and saplings (which are trees of the future).
- Trees in hedgerows greatly enhance the beauty of our landscapes and they provide song posts and vantage points as well as additional nest and roosting sites for wildlife.
- When retaining trees make sure to give them a wide berth so they are not damaged by the hedge-cutting flail or saw.

## Machinery

---

- When cutting a hedgerow or woody plants, a clean cut is required. Shattered or frayed branches can lead to decay and disease and reduce the vigour of the hedgerow. They can also look very unsightly.
- Sharp edges on cutting equipment are essential in order to give a clean cut. Blades should be sharpened regularly during the hedge cutting season (c. every two weeks).

## Suitable Machines

---

- Finger bars- suited to regular trimming of soft, light material
- Flails- suited to material up to 12mm diameter. They can be used to break stronger stems but no desirable as leads to shattered and frayed branches.
- Circular saw- suitable for cutting larger stems, for re-shaping hedgerows and coppicing.

## Frequency of Hedge Cutting

---

- Ideally hedgerows should be cut every three years in order to promote vigorous growth and to maintain the wildlife value of a hedgerow.
- Roadside hedges may need to be cut more often to ensure road safety.
- Cutting too often reduces the amount of flowers that hedgerow shrubs produce.

# Record keeping

---

Where possible take photographs on your phone before and after cutting the hedgerow which will help maintain a record of hedgerow management within the county.

\*Based on Teagasc guidance [https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/environment/biodiversity-countryside/routine\\_mechanical\\_hedge\\_cutting.pdf](https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/environment/biodiversity-countryside/routine_mechanical_hedge_cutting.pdf)

## Additional Resources

---

### Hedgerows of County Galway

<https://heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/heritage-publications/hedgerows-county-galway>

**Conserving hedgerows** [https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/conserving\\_hedgerows\\_2mb.pdf](https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/conserving_hedgerows_2mb.pdf)

**Hedgerows for pollinators** <https://pollinators.ie/resources/hedgerows/>

**Hedgerow management** [https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2009/teagasc\\_farmhedge\\_management.pdf](https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2009/teagasc_farmhedge_management.pdf)

[http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/Englishhedgerows1\\_tcm9-133255.pdf](http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/Englishhedgerows1_tcm9-133255.pdf)

**The value of hedgerows** [https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2009/value\\_of\\_hedgerows.pdf](https://www.teagasc.ie/media/website/publications/2009/value_of_hedgerows.pdf)

**Identifying Japanese knotweed** <https://biodiversity.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/invasive-species/knotweeds>

**Managing a healthy hedgerow** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXETU0gZ9Y0>

**Hedgerows and wildlife** [https://youtu.be/g9MDO\\_5q25U](https://youtu.be/g9MDO_5q25U)

*An initiative of Galway County Council and part funded by National Biodiversity Action Plan*



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe  
Galway County Council



An Roinn  
Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta  
Department of  
Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht