




The
countryside
charity

A little rough guide around the hedges

Why we love hedgerows and
how you can share the love





Hedgerows play many roles: they're homes for wildlife, climate superheroes, and keep livestock where they're supposed to be. They also help to keep soils healthy, reduce flooding and give much of the countryside its unique character. They are important in our towns and cities too, reducing air pollution and sheltering urban wildlife.



They're hardworking heroes of the countryside!



But these special habitats are at risk. We believe that the beauty and benefits of hedgerows in the landscape should be a pleasure that future generations are able to enjoy, too.

At CPRE, the countryside charity, we're passionate about hedgerows.

Not only are they beautiful and useful - they are also vital for tackling the climate crisis.

We've put this booklet together to share our enthusiasm for them with you. Now you can find out more about hedgerows and celebrate them with us!

We've got hints for how to help our hedgerows continue to flourish, some fun hedgerow facts and a handy guide to help you spot hedgerow plants.

So why do we care so much?

Hedgerows are the vital stitching in the patchwork quilt of the countryside.

Their plants make the changing seasons visible as well as giving us a strong feeling of continuity through history. Some of our hedgerows date back to medieval times!

Healthy hedgerows are teeming with life and vital for nature. One in nine of the UK's most vulnerable species are often found in hedgerows. These include the hazel dormouse and the much-loved hedgehog, whose decline has been closely associated with hedgerow loss.

They're helping us to beat climate change by taking carbon from the atmosphere and they protect our soils, reduce flooding and clean the air.



CPRE's hedgerow campaign

We're calling on the government to make changes that will mean many, many more hedgerows are restored or planted. We want to see them work with the landowners who own hedges, and with local councils, to create thousands of miles of new or improved hedgerows - as well as better protecting the ones we have already.



And we want this hedgerow work to happen fast.



The government has made promises to move towards net zero carbon emissions for the UK. Investment in hedgerows offers a



low-risk, manageable and cost-effective way to tackle climate change, boost biodiversity and enhance our landscapes.

We're running projects to get hedgerows planted, restored and maintained - and we'll keep campaigning to see more action from the government.



Did you know?

-  The oldest known surviving hedgerow in England is Judith's Hedge in Cambridgeshire, which is over 900 years old!
-  By far the commonest hedge shrub is the hawthorn, but no one really knows why. It could be from the Celtic tradition of planting it around sacred places.
-  More than 80% of our farmland birds rely on hedges for protection and food.
-  Many rare or threatened species, including the hazel dormouse, most kinds of bat and the great-crested newt, need well-connected networks of hedgerows to survive.
-  Hedgerows can cut the rate of climate change. Our British hedgerows store up to 13 million tonnes of carbon: the equivalent of soaking up the carbon emissions of up to 3.28 million cars over 10 years!
-  Hedgerows help to prevent fields from losing soil, because they reduce wind and water erosion - and they regulate water supply for crops.
-  We have urban hedgerows too! In towns and cities, they provide useful water drainage, cut air pollution and are homes for urban wildlife.



Some hedgerow history

A vanishing act



We might take them for granted as it feels like they've always been there, but hedgerows are made by people and need to be cared for to survive and thrive.

We've already lost a lot of our hedgerows - and more could disappear if we don't protect and manage them.

For a long time, from 1870 until 1945, we know that hedgerow cover didn't change much. Aerial

photographs from 1940 show hedgerows criss-crossing the country.

But between 1950 and 1975 the loss of hedgerows became one of the most shocking and visible aspects of damage to the English countryside.

A countryside survey done regularly by experts showed that there were 511,000km of managed hedgerows in England in 1984. By 2007, around 109,000km of these had been lost.



Many of the farmers and land managers who care for the countryside are working hard to plant and restore hedgerows. But the way we use land has changed, and hedgerows are sometimes removed as part of this as fields are opened up or fences used instead. Roads and other building, especially at town and village edges, are the other main cause of hedgerow loss.



There is a law that means some hedgerows can be classed as 'important' - but even those can be removed, as permission for building overrides their protection.



Hedgerows need tender loving care

Hedgerows need to be looked after sensitively and with skill - not left to become too unruly or tidied up too much. Too much trimming over a long time (often seen with hawthorn hedges) can slowly kill off the hedge, but being left unmanaged means a hedgerow will proceed through its natural life cycle in an uncontrolled way.

This leaves too-tall, ageing hedges, which become even harder to care for. And if these hedgerows become gappy or need to be cut back to the base to grow again, it means they don't make good homes for wildlife - because they stop being the corridors for nature that work so well. They also won't be effective barriers to keep cows and sheep where they're supposed to be!

Get to know hedgerows



When you're next out in the countryside, use our handy guide to identify what you see in the hedgerows.

Did you know?

Birch brooms carried on being used across the world well into the 1900s. Here, they were ideal as cheap but hardy tools for use in homes, gardening and in steel mills.



Birch





Alder buckthorn



Black poplar



Beech



Blackthorn



Bramble





Broom



Dogwood



Crab apple



Elder



Dog rose



Field maple





Goat willow



Hazel



Gorse



Holly



Guelder rose



Hornbeam





Large-leaved lime



Spindle



Oak



Wayfaring tree



Rowan



Wild cherry



Wild service tree

Did you know?

Springtime hawthorn blossom is the original wedding confetti! It was traditional to get married in spring.



Hawthorn



How can hedgerows be protected?



At CPRE, we've cared for hedgerows for a long time. Incredibly, hedgerows weren't given protection until 1997 thanks to a long campaign by CPRE. Happily, this meant that the first legal protections for 'important' hedgerows - the Hedgerows Regulations - were finally created.

That word 'important' is key here. These national rules say what makes a hedgerow important, but

they're quite limited and can be complicated. Local authorities have said they'd like them to be stronger and clearer, which would make them easier to apply.

And, sadly, garden hedgerows and hedges standing in the way of new buildings aren't included in these protections. We'd like to see hedgerows cared for better.

Become a CPRE member

We at CPRE will keep working to protect, enhance and promote hedgerows, and your membership is invaluable in supporting this work! We'd love you to join CPRE. Contact us on **0800 163 680** or contact supportercare@cpre.org.uk.





Join in on social media

We share exciting content and updates about our hedgerow campaign on social media. Follow CPRE on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) to join the conversation.



Share our passion for hedgerows and want to help?



Get out and about

Take our pocket guide and enjoy some fresh air exploring the countryside and hedgerows near you. Enjoy and celebrate your local hedgerows - and tell everyone how heroic hedgerows are!

Keep up to date with CPRE's campaigns

Get our monthly email delivered straight to your inbox. It'll give you the latest news about all our campaigns, including our work on hedgerows, as well as quick and easy actions you can take to help. [Sign up at cpre.org.uk](https://www.cpre.org.uk).

Become a hedgerow volunteer



Want to get hands-on with hedgerows? CPRE groups and volunteers all around the country are working

to protect, plant and restore hedgerows. CPRE has local groups in every county. Contact your local group and other wildlife groups to see if they would like to focus on hedgerows - for example, by running a local survey to build up data about each hedgerow as vital evidence to monitor it over time.



Worried about hedgerow removal?

If you're worried about the loss of local hedgerows due to development, contact your council, either the planning or environment departments, to check about hedgerow permissions. It's also worth asking your council to save existing hedgerows from future development. It can insist the developer does this by clearly identifying important hedgerows in any site masterplan or brief and/or by attaching conditions to planning permission.





Useful websites

CPRE The countryside charity: cpre.org.uk

Hedgeline: hedgeline.org.uk

The Tree Council: treecouncil.org.uk

People's Trust for Endangered Species: ptes.org

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs: defra.gov.uk

Natural England: naturalengland.gov.uk

CPRE is the countryside charity that campaigns to promote, enhance and protect the countryside for everyone's benefit, wherever they live.

cpre.org.uk



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