PLANT FOR NATURE

Not All Hedges Are Equal

Before Planting A Hedge, Ask One Question: Will it help wildlife?

Green Fridays

GreenFridays.org

Why Does the Choice of Hedge Matter?

Hedges are much more than garden or field boundaries. They provide food, shelter and nesting places for birds, bees, butterflies and other wildlife.





But not all hedges offer the same benefits. Many popular hedging plants, such as laurel, offer fewer benefits for native wildlife than mixed native hedgerows. In contrast, a mixed native hedgerow can support a wide variety of species throughout the seasons.

Mature native hedgerows provide nesting places for birds and roosting opportunities for bats, as well as nectar for bees and other insects. 55 of Ireland’s bird species use hedges during the nesting and breeding seasons.

Hedgerows support a wide variety of native plants, including dog rose, primrose and brambles, as well as insects that provide food for birds, badgers and other wildlife. They also connect fragmented green spaces, creating vital corridors that allow wildlife to move between habitats.

Think Beyond the Boundary

A native hedgerow can be much more than a property boundary. It can provide food, shelter and habitat for wildlife throughout the year.

- **Spring flowers:** Hawthorn, blackthorn and other native species provide nectar and pollen for bees and other pollinating insects.
- **Summer shelter:** Dense foliage offers nesting sites for birds and protection for insects and small mammals like hedgehogs.
- **Autumn berries:** Haws, sloes and blackberries provide valuable food for birds and other wildlife.
- **Winter protection:** Established hedges offer shelter from cold weather and predators.
- **Wildlife corridors:** Hedgerows connect habitats, allowing wildlife to move safely between gardens, fields and woodlands.



Five Plants Worth Considering

These native hedgerow species provide food, shelter and nesting places for a wide range of wildlife throughout the year.



Hawthorn

Spring blossom for pollinators, autumn berries for birds.



Blackthorn

Early flowers for bees, sloes for birds and mammals.



Hazel

Early pollen for insects and autumn nuts for birds and mammals.



Holly

Winter berries for birds and year-round shelter.



Guelder rose

Flowers for insects and berries for birds.

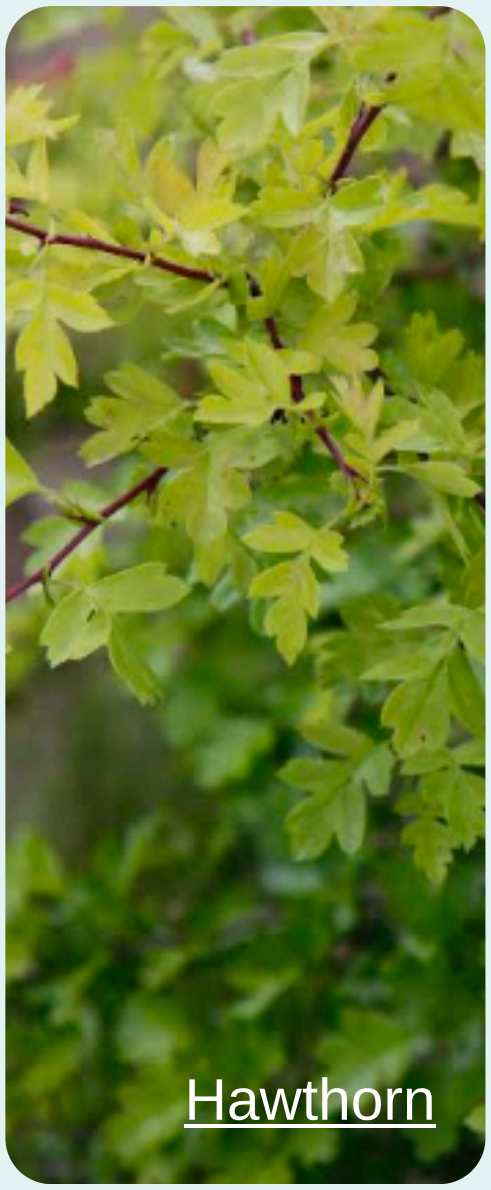
How to Look After Native Hedgerows

Mature native hedgerows provide habitats for birds, insects and small mammals.

How hedges are managed matters. Hawthorn hedges should not be cut every year to allow them to flower, thereby increasing the food available to birds and other wildlife.

Research by the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology found that cutting hedges every three years, rather than annually, resulted in substantially more flowers and berries on hawthorn hedges.

Hedge laying is an important way to maintain hedgerow biodiversity. It increases the density of the hedge base, encouraging new growth that provides shelter, food and connections between habitats.



Hawthorn



Planning a New Hedge This Winter?

Five Simple Steps to Get Started

Autumn is the perfect time to plan ahead. In Ireland, the best time of the year to plant is when the roots are dormant, usually from mid-November to February.

1. **Choose native species.** Mix hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, holly, guelder rose, crab apple, honeysuckle, rowan, spindle, elder and wild cherry, to provide food and shelter throughout the year.
2. **Plant a mixture.** Different species support different birds, insects and mammals.
3. **Think about location.** Choose a suitable site with enough space for your hedge to grow.
4. **Buy locally sourced plants.** Where possible, choose Irish-grown plants of native provenance.
5. **Give them a good start.** Plant as soon as possible after delivery. Protect them from frost. Keep roots moist before planting and protect young plants from severe frost. Follow the supplier's planting instructions.



See the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan for more advice on how to plant a hedge for biodiversity.

Give Your Hedge a Chance to Grow

You don't need to plant a new hedge to make a difference. Changing how you manage an existing one can be just as valuable.

- Cut hawthorn hedges less frequently. Allow flowers and berries to bloom.
- Avoid cutting during nesting season. In Ireland, cutting hedges is prohibited from 1 March to 31 August under The Wildlife Act, subject to certain exemptions.
- Let some areas grow naturally. A wider, denser hedge with brambles and ivy provides better shelter, feeding and nesting opportunities.
- Leave fallen leaves. They provide habitat for insects and shelter for creatures such as hedgehogs, while also helping to improve soil health.



Dog rose

Green Fridays Takeaway

Sometimes the best way to help nature is to protect what we already have.

Hedgerows are much more than boundaries. They provide food, shelter and vital connections between habitats for birds, insects and other wildlife.

By choosing a mixture of native species, protecting established hedges and allowing flowers and berries to develop, we can make our gardens and countryside more welcoming to wildlife.



Learn more, explore the sources and discover practical ways to help at GreenFridays.org/learn.

Green Fridays

THE GREEN ROUTE