

# ENVIRONMENT

December 2021

## Think before you plant!

Edited by  
**Catherine Keena,**  
Countryside Management Specialist

Are you one of the 600 farmers who opted to plant a hedge in the Results-Based Environment-Agri Pilot Project (REAP)? Or maybe you are one of the many farmers who wish to add a valuable asset to your farm by planting a hedge that will help climate change and biodiversity long into the future, leaving a positive legacy to your farming career?

Before you plant a hedge it is essential to understand how trees and shrubs grow. The

leader or central shoot of a tree is destined to grow up, causing the tree to develop into a single bole stem with a canopy. This occurs because of apical dominance, which is the phenomenon whereby the main, central stem of the plant is dominant over other side stems. When apical dominance is broken by cutting or pruning, lateral and dormant buds just below the cut fight to become the new terminal leader. Hedges are managed habitats and need

**TOPPED HEDGE**



**ESCAPED HEDGE**



management to be maintained.

There are two distinct hedge types in Ireland. Both types are good, but each requires totally different management. A lack of understanding of each hedge type leads to inappropriate management and damage to hedges. Ideally each farm should have both types of hedges present – to maximise biodiversity benefits. The types of hedges are:

1. **Escaped (untopped) hedge or treeline:** do not top. Side trim only.
2. **Topped hedges:** top to maintain as a hedge – a little above the previous year's cut. Aim to grow up to at least 1.5m and retain a new thorn tree in every hedge.

Topped hedges are managed habitats and need management to be maintained in order to retain a dense base.

## Hedging trees and shrubs

Hedging trees and shrubs that thrive with cutting or if left as trees.



Whitethorn.



Blackthorn.



Holly.



Spindle.



Guelder rose.



Hazel.



Dog rose (flower).\*



Dog rose (fruit).\*



Woodbine/honeysuckle.\*

\*Dog rose and woodbine/honeysuckle are climbers.

## Planting a new hedge

Do you want a hedge with a dense base that will be regularly topped or do you want a line of trees that will never be topped? If you want your new hedge to become a stockproof topped hedge, dense at the base – here are the steps to follow:

Buy two-year-old bare rooted whips, six plants

per metre, mainly whitethorn, but once every 2m replace one with another hedging species that tolerates trimming such as blackthorn, holly, hazel, spindle, guelder rose, dog rose or woodbine; therefore, for every 100m of new hedge buy 550 whitethorns and 50 of these other species.



Mark out the line of the new hedge using wire, twine or lime.



Cultivate with a digger or mini-digger to make it easier to plant and give plants a great start. Protect roots from drying out during planting by keeping plants in the bag until needed.



Plant in a double-staggered row – with 330mm (just over a foot) between the rows and the same between the plants within the rows – often the length of a boot.



Plant to the same depth as was previously planted – don't bury the stem or expose the roots. Firm in.



Identify a few whitethorns (maybe five per 100m) to be retained as trees and protect with tree guards or shelters.



Prune all other plants except holly down to an inch or so above ground level with a sloping cut to leave a sharp point.



Push a 4ft or 1.2m wide strip of used silage plastic (or preferably compostable film) down neatly over the cut stumps.

Press the edges of the plastic into the ground to hold it down. Protect from livestock including rabbits if necessary. The aim is to remove any wire in a few years.



MESSAGE FROM SIGNPOST PROGRAMME

## How big is your carbon footprint?



In order to reduce the carbon emissions on your farm, you need to know what the carbon emissions are. The starting point for many people (54,000 farmers) will be their Bord Bia Farmer Feedback Report.

After each audit, all certified dairy and beef farmers receive a Farmer Feedback Report from Bord Bia with their farm's carbon footprint. The carbon footprint is the ratio of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to total outputs of the farm enterprise.

The carbon footprint is measured as kg CO<sub>2</sub>

equivalents per kg of unit output. The unit output for dairy is kg fat and protein corrected milk (FPCM) and for beef is kg liveweight gain. Your most recent carbon footprint is displayed on the first page of the report, alongside your previous audit result (where available), and the typical carbon footprint of farms within your category.

To view, you will need your herd number and the pin given at your last audit. Call the Bord Bia helpdesk on 01-524 0410 if you need to retrieve your pin.

## Teagasc Hedgerow Week 2021

Visit: <https://www.teagasc.ie/corporate-events/sustainable-agriculture-webinars/> to register for these Signpost webinars. See [www.teagasc.ie](http://www.teagasc.ie) for lots more on Teagasc Hedgerow Week 2021.

### Signpost webinars

- **Friday, December 3 from 9.30am-10.30am:** Planting hedges – Catherine Keena, Teagasc Countryside Management Specialist.
- **Friday, December 10 from 9.30am-10.30am:** The value of native provenance trees and hedging stock and how to reduce health risks to them. Joe Gowran, Woodlands of Ireland CEO and Maria Cullen, Chair of the Society of Irish Plant Pathologists (SIPP).