

History

In the past, hedges were viewed as a valuable resource – people gathered everything from fruit to firewood from their local hedges and benefited from a free harvest of healthy local food. Unfortunately, this culture that connected food with where it comes from is being lost. Our grandparents and parents may remember blackberrying, but with urbanisation and the rise of convenience food, many of us wouldn't know what to pick or how to use it.

The use of hedges and their trees as food sources during World War II is well documented; there was even a Ministry of Food leaflet called *Hedgerow Harvest*. This sparked The Tree Council's interest in the potential for modern hedges to be used as a food supply. So, to whet your appetite for foraging, we have included a number of recipes on the Hedgerow Harvest website (see *Where to find out more*).

If anyone has recipes to share, upload them to the website.

Why hedges?

One reason the traditional linear structure of a hedge is so good for producing fruit and nuts is that it provides a great habitat for pollinating insects. It also allows sufficient sunlight to reach and ripen the developing fruit.

In some parts of the country, this simple idea of using a hedge as a linear larder has been taken further with the development of

How to plant

Traditionally, there are two planting patterns for hedges. How a hedge is planted depends on how impenetrable it needs to become and the width of space available for it to grow.

Single row hedge

A single row of hedging planted at about 300mm centres is good for a narrow space such as beside a fence or path.



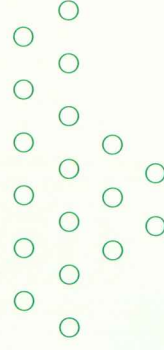
Double row hedge

A double row of hedging material planted in two rows 300mm apart and staggered at 300mm centres, will give a thicker hedge that takes up more space. However it provides a better screen and a good wildlife corridor.



Wavy edge hedge

A third approach, if there is space, for instance around the edge of a playing field or park, is to plant extra trees and hedging at intervals along the hedge line to turn it into linear woodland that is even better for wildlife and for foraging.



Foraging

A whole range of fruit, nuts, berries and leaves can be harvested from hedges.

Start in spring with wild garlic and young nettle tops. In early summer, there are elder flowers, young lime leaves, lime blossom and hawthorn leaves. In late summer, there are plums, cherries and soft fruits. Finally, in the autumn there are nuts, apples and berries.

Responsible foraging

Fruit is the property of the landowner, so it should be collected only with the permission of the owner.

Don't:

- ▶ forage along busy roads
- ▶ pick anything if you are not sure what it is
- ▶ let children eat food from hedgerows unless you are absolutely certain what they are picking is not harmful
- ▶ snap branches or damage trees to reach fruit.

Do:

- ▶ leave some fruit for other people and wildlife
- ▶ keep a note of any blossom in the spring, and return there in the autumn
- ▶ start collecting jars for jams and pickles, so they are ready when needed
- ▶ share produce with neighbours.