

TREES AND HEDGEROWS

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Trees and hedgerows

WHY?

Trees and hedges are a key feature of our British landscape and often provide ancient habitats in many churchyards. Some were established to enclose the original burial grounds, whilst many others were planted in the 18th century. They are not only beautiful and interesting in themselves but also provide important habitats for a wide range of wildlife, including hedgehogs, dormice, grass snakes, birds, bees, butterflies, moths and many bugs.

The human environment is also greatly enhanced by trees and hedges. They cool us in the summer and provide shelter from wind in winter; they reduce pollution, capture carbon and mitigate flooding. They improve our mental health and wellbeing, create an attractive environment and inspire us to worship God seeing his hand at work in creation: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2020/07/biodiversity-and-native-woods/>

HOW?

HEDGES

Churchyard hedges are important habitats, as they not only provide food and shelter, they also act as essential corridors with other habitats such as ditches, ponds or woodlands. Birds particularly appreciate native hedges as they are a safe place to raise young, escape from predators and search for food, whether insects or seeds and berries: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/plants-for-wildlife/garden-hedges>

Older hedges often contain plenty of dead wood and plant litter, which are habitats for invertebrates which in turn attract their predators. If you have space to plant new hedging, native hedges are ideal, although many churches will have existing hedges of non-native species, which are nevertheless of considerable value to wildlife: <https://shop.woodlandtrust.org.uk/hedge-starter-pack>



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Good management practices are crucial to the maintenance of a healthy hedgerow which is beneficial to wildlife. Most hedges are either cut too frequently or neglected. The frequency of cutting determines the availability of fruit and flowers in the hedge; typically cutting every three years or more is of most benefit to wildlife. Be particularly sure not to cut hedges when birds are nesting or wildlife is overwintering. Cutting by hand helps you spot late season nesting birds and leave other wildlife undisturbed. Hedgeline offers very helpful management advice, including 'Top Ten Tips for a Healthy Hedge': <https://hedgeline.org.uk/hedgerows/hedgerow-management-advice/>

TREES

Many churchyards have ancient trees, undisturbed by cultivation for centuries. Indeed some churchyards in England and Wales house 900 yews more than 500 years old, with many significantly older. Such ancient trees are particularly valuable in terms of biodiversity, housing a variety of wildlife and fungi in their living, dying or decaying wood. You can add your ancient trees to the Woodland Trust register here: <https://ati.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

Russell Ball of the Ancient Yew Group offers this video on managing your yew trees: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMJfkhjypJw>

It's not just ancient trees that benefit wildlife, so the overriding message is to keep trees safe for the public and protect buildings and memorials where required, but interfere as little as possible. Leaving dead wood in place and allowing natural decomposition to occur, rather than tidying it up, is now considered best practice. The Woodland Trust has advice on what to choose if you are planting a new tree: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/blog/2019/03/british-trees-to-plant-in-your-garden/>

And the Wildlife Trust tells you how to do it: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-plant-tree>



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Landowners have a duty to maintain trees and boundaries in good order; in churches this responsibility usually falls to the PCC or other governing body. Sadly, trees are under threat from many introduced or new pests and diseases. Ash dieback is probably the most well-known; others of concern are Acute oak decline and Phytophthoras. A quick walk round the churchyard every month or so should help identify early signs, and professional assessment every five years, or when issues arise, is recommended. The Arboricultural Association has lots of helpful advice for landowners, including legal and maintenance guidelines: <https://trees.org.uk/Help-Advice/Help-for-Tree-Owners>

Should you need to do any work to larger trees, you may need permission from your local council if you are in a conservation area or if there is a tree protection order in place. Church of England churches need a faculty permission: <https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/trees>



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LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

The Woodland Trust website is full of information about all aspects of trees – their identification, information about the animals, birds, fungi and lichens that rely on them, advice about tree pests and even an osprey webcam: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>

If you have space to plant a woodland there may be funding available: <https://futureforestsnetwork.org/resources/funding/>

To find suitable experts, see the Arboricultural Association: <https://trees.org.uk/>

iTree is a tool which provides urban and rural forestry analysis and assesses benefits. It has been used to estimate the ecosystem value of various conurbations in the UK:

<https://www.itreetools.org/>

<https://www.itreetools.org/support/resources-overview/i-tree-international/reports-nation>

BOOKS

Peter Wohlleben runs an environmentally friendly woodland in Germany. He writes about ground-breaking, scientific research in his fascinating books, published by Greystone books:

- *The Hidden Life of Trees*, 2016 (paperback), 2018 (illustrated hardback)
- *The Heartbeat of Trees*, 2021

CASE STUDIES

Members of St Lawrence's Church, Hungerford have discovered that tree planting with the local community is fun and a great way to get to know people. See the separate paper.