Colwall Orchard Group:

Safe Way of Working: SWOW 05 - Hedgelaying, & Trimming.

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Based on Hedgelaying Instructions by Martin Hales

Review: Annually thereafter (or in the event of an accident)

Reviewed by: Martin Blamire 10 February 2025

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# Introduction

This document provides an overview of stages of the hedgelaying process and the safety requirements COG members need to follow when involved in any work involving hedgelaying and trimming.

# COG Responsibility

It is the COG Sustainable Land Use team leader’s responsibility to authorise people who are regarded as competent to work unsupervised with our hedgelaying tools and to lead all hedgelaying activities involving volunteers and inexperienced people. A risk assessment is required for all hedgelaying, trimming and coppicing activities based on the template in this document but taking into account any special factors associated with the site, access, weather, condition of existing hedge and the experience levels of the people involved.

# Competence

These activities require the use of sharp tools on sometimes difficult materials and, on occasion, people working in close proximity to each other. It is important that enough competent people are available to lead and supervise all activities.

# 1 – Hedgelaying

Before starting any work, stand back and assess the hedge to be laid, discuss how to approach the task.

## Clearing the Hedgeline

Clear around the bottom of the hedge to give yourself room to work. Get rid of any broken glass and rubbish.

Clean away dead rotting timber from the hedge litter.

## Preliminary Trimming

Trim excess brush from the nearside of the hedge, i.e. the side opposite the stock, cutting back to the line of the hedge

## Selecting Pleachers

Pleachers are the stems that are cut and laid. Cut out all dead wood and all growth that is out of line with the hedge. Keep sufficient spare pleachers until you are certain they are not needed. Always remove elder. It grows vigorously and suppresses other plants but cannot be laid property.

Whenever there is a choice between young and old pleachers, lay the young ones because they regenerate better. Try to use relatively evenly spaced pleachers.

## Laying the Pleachers

The first group of pleachers cannot be laid into the standing hedge alongside. They should be cut and laid out to one side so that they are available to fill the gap left when the last pleachers of the adjacent section are laid.

Make sure the pleacher you are about to lay is not tangled in the rest of the hedge.

Cut so that the trimmed stump will be at between 3-10cm above the ground. If you are forced to cut higher than this, cut a notch in the stump to encourage low stump regrowth. Cut through far enough that the pleacher will lower into place without forcing, but leave sufficient cambium and sapwood uncut to allow the pleacher to survive. Start 1st cut approx. 3 times as high as the stem is wide use a billhook or axe.

Lay uphill where possible to help the sap flow. But lay all the pleachers to the same angle, according to local style

## Staking

Stakes should be about 4cm diameter and long enough to be knocked about 50cm into the ground but still project about 10cm above the top of the hedge.

Put the stakes in as you go so that the brushy tops of the pleachers can be woven in between the stakes as you lay them.

It is always helpful to cut a point at the bottom of each stake to ease entry into the ground

## Adding Binders

To strengthen and finish the laid hedge, weave the long binders between the stakes and on top of the laid pleachers, adding a new one (thick end first) at each stake

Using a crude mallet, knock the finished binding down to an agreed height along the whole length of the laid hedge

## Trimming

Trim the tops of the stakes after binding a section of hedge, then trim off all the springy bits sticking out of the hedge on the far side and even up its overall shape.

Trim stakes to an agreed height, making the cuts slant forwards so that rain runs off

Stand back and admire your work.

# 2 – Hedge Trimming (after hedgelaying)

Using loppers, trim off any stray branches that project forwards from the laid hedge.

# Further Information

Please also refer to

1. Any available COG Site Based Risk Assessments for the site being visited

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