

Improving Biodiversity on Your Farm: Hedgerow Planting December, January and February are key months to get planting native trees and hedging on your farm. Always plant native trees and hedging on the farm as they have a much higher biodiversity value. That means they provide a higher habitat value for our natural flora and fauna to live in. It is always a good idea to have a look around your parish to see what native trees and shrubs are growing successfully. Trees and shrubs are in their dormant stage during these months and it is a great time to plant bare rooted quicks or trees.

Where to plant: Select areas or strips on the farm where a good stock proof boundary is required and shelter would be a value to farm animals. Typical areas that could be considered are; along one side of a farm roadway or between paddocks where there are vast open expanses of grassland. Perhaps there is a section of the farmyard boundary with surrounding fields where a hedge could be planted. Planting into existing fences can be valuable but this will require more ongoing care to make sure the hedging survives. The risks are that the quicks can get choked with growth in the summer or die from lack of water as the fence dries out in late spring and summer. The earth in these old fences is generally very poor in terms of essential nutrients and if in-planting, backfill the plants with good quality soil to provide nutrients to the establishing quicks. Keep an eye on the plants to cut growth back and water them if conditions are very dry. The key piece is to put up a fence outside the planted area to prevent livestock from grazing the plants.

If planting in a new hedge, turn the sod with a 3ft digger bucket and erect, ideally a sheep wire fence or at a minimum a double strand of wire at each side of the turned over strip. The quicks should be planted in a double-staggered row, 18 inches apart and 18 inches between rows. Once planted, the quicks should be cut with a garden secateurs at an angle approx. 8 cm above ground. The reason for this is that each plant will then produce 4-8 shoots which can again be cut after one years growth at 8cm above the first cut. This means that after 2 years growth you will increase the number of stems from one to between 8 and 16 stems. Once the quicks are cut, a strip of plastic (silage cover plastic) should be rolled over the plants and you then use the angled cut to punch each plant through the plastic. Tighten the plastic and secure to the ground with gravel or earth. The plastic will protect the plants from smothering out with grass, especially in the first 2-3 years. This planting method results in a much more dense and stock proof hedge at the base in the long run. If the quicks are not cut at this stage, the hedge will need to be laid in 5-6 years to achieve the same level of density at the base. Finally, choose a native tree (Oak, Ash, Silver Birch, Alder) to plant every 20-30 metres. The hedging itself, can be a mix of native species such as hawthorn, hazel, dog rose and guelder rose.

Teagasc Hedgerow Week 2021 was launched on Friday 3 December during the weekly Signpost webinar which takes place from 9.30 – 10.30am with Minister Pippa Hackett and Teagasc Director Frank O'Mara. The webinar, delivered by Dr Catherine Keena Teagasc Countryside Management Specialist and deals with planting hedges on farm. A competition was also launched for farmers to send photos of recently planted hedges and one lucky winner will receive a roll of compostable film for weed control in newly planted hedges from Maizetech. The theme of Hedgerow Week is 'Understanding hedges better'. There will be a Hedgerow Week webinar each morning from 9.30 – 10.30 with Catherine Keena, Teagasc Countryside Management Specialist along with a panel of experts and interested stakeholders, addressing questions raised by participants. The webinars are recorded and can be watched afterwards if you missed it. Visit www.teagasc.ie for more information.

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