

**Farm Hedges can be Trimmed NOW**  
**By Anthony O'Connor, Teagasc Adviser, Athenry**

As we head towards winter, the days shorten, darkness descends earlier, the bird nesting season is over. Farm hedgerows can be trimmed NOW while ground conditions remain firm and dry.

In this article, we answer questions posed to Teagasc Advisers about hedge trimming/cutting.

**Q. During what time of the year can I trim hedges?**

**A.** Hedgerows can only be trimmed between 1st September and 28th of February. Hedge cutting should only be carried out under dry weather conditions so poaching of land near the hedge by tractor and hedge cutter does not occur. Cutting hedgerows outside of this period could incur a penalty on all direct payments of up to 5%.

**Q. What is the best shape to trim a hedge to, in order to encourage birds and wildlife?**

**A.** If we want birds and wildlife in hedgerows, best practice is to side trim to a triangular shape, leaving the peak as high as possible, sloping both sides from a wide base. This allows light to the base encouraging dense growth at ground level.

**Q. Can I use a JCB or tracked machine to knock down or crush hedges?**

**A.** No, a flail cutter or circular saw should only be used.

**Q. I have recently cut/trimmed some hedges on my farm, I have gathered the hedge trimmings together, do I need a permit to burn them and where can I get a permit?**

**A.** Yes, a permit is needed in advance if you want to burn any hedge trimmings; but no accelerants can be used. You can obtain a permit by contacting Environmental Section, Galway County Council, Prospect Hill, Galway City. Telephone Number is 091 476402. You may have to wait up to a week before you receive a permit. You cannot burn until you get written approval from the County Council and you must notify the local Fire Brigade before and after burning.

**Q. I am not in REPS, I want to remove a length of hedge between two small fields which I intend to reseed; can I remove this hedge?**

**A.** For all farmers (whether in REPS or not), all hedges are termed as landscape features and are protected under Cross Compliance regulations. If you remove a length of hedge, you must plant the same length of hedge along a different farm boundary; this new hedge must be planted in advance of removal of any existing hedge.

A penalty will be imposed on the Single Farm Payment, Disadvantaged Area Scheme payment, AEOS payments etc of any farmer who removes a hedgerow without having planted the same length of hedge in advance of removing the existing hedge. The penalty will depend on the length of hedge removed but varies from 1% if less than 20m to 5% if more than 100meters. If hedgerows or field boundaries of more than 500m are to be removed you must apply to the DAFM for approval before work starts.

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