

Reducing the frequency of hedgerow cutting as a biodiversity-friendly farming practice



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Good quality hedgerows provide corridors for wildlife to travel across the landscape. They provide wildlife with sources of food, places to breed and nest. Agricultural intensification has led to hedgerows being removed, or over-managed with frequent cutting. Frequent cutting prevents flowering and subsequent fruit production, reducing resources for birds, pollinators, and mammals and limits other ecosystem services that hedgerows provide.



Photo credit: Saorla Kavanagh

Reducing cutting frequency, for example cutting on a three-to-five-year rotation, will increase the number of flowers and fruits within the hedgerow and will increase its value to biodiversity. Avoiding cutting during nesting periods will protect nests, and minimising spraying or fertiliser application near the hedgerow will increase the number of flowers growing at the base of the hedgerow. Splitting hedgerows into groups to allow for rotational cutting (e.g. cutting some hedges in year-1 others in year-2 and others in year-3) will ensure that some hedgerows are always in flower.

Rotational hedgerow management can increase pollinator-friendly habitat, and the amount and different types of pollinators on the farm. Good quality hedgerows can protect waterways by reducing agricultural run-off, prevent soil erosion by absorbing excess water, provide shelter to livestock, and provide habitats for natural predators to help control crop and livestock pests. Reducing cutting frequency can also reduce hedgerow management time.

What farmers can do?

Allow hedgerows to grow tall, $\geq 2\text{m}$ in height and wide, $\geq 2\text{m}$. Allow them to flower and fruit. Develop a simple hedgerow management plan based on a 3–5-year rotation. Cut no more than one section or one side in any year. Avoid chemical inputs near hedgerows.

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