

Information Sheet 2

Looking after Young Trees and Hedging



Weeding

Trees and hedging will not grow well and will probably die if they are not weeded properly. It is essential that grass and other weeds are kept away from the base of the young plant, because 1 square metre of vigorously growing grass takes up to 5 gallons of water per week - this is the water your trees and hedging need to survive!

Do not mow the grass around the base of the trees or hedging as this just makes the grass grow more vigorously and take up more water. Ideally you should be maintaining a totally grass and weed-free area around the base of each plant.

What is Needed?

Trees You should remove or kill off a 1 m diameter circle of vegetation around the base of each tree.

Hedges You should maintain a 1.5m wide weed free strip with your hedge in the centre.

How to do it

We recommend that weeds should be killed or removed by the end of April before the soil begins to dry out. This will leave the maximum amount of water for use by the trees or hedging through the summer. On particularly fertile soils you may need to control weeds again in mid-summer - this will depend on your particular circumstances.

A variety of methods of weed control can be used.

Chemical Weed Control

The only chemical we recommend is glyphosate, which is widely available and can be bought as Tumbleweed from garden centres or as Roundup from agricultural supply merchants. It is a systemic herbicide which is absorbed by the weeds and kills both leaves and roots in about 2 weeks. Glyphosate becomes inactive as soon as it touches soil, and should not harm plants away from the vegetation.

The use of all weed control chemicals is strictly controlled by the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. This basically says:

- You must follow exactly the manufacturers' instructions on the label when using the herbicide.
- Domestic products such as Tumbleweed do not require certificated users but you should always follow the instructions carefully.
- Anyone applying commercial products such as Roundup must hold a certificate of competence unless they own the land on which they are working.

To apply glyphosate

- Read the label instructions and follow them very carefully.
- Apply the chemical when the vegetation is actively growing. To have the most beneficial effects for your trees the first application should be in April.
- Only apply glyphosate on a dry, calm day. It needs at least 6 hours of dry weather after application to be effective and you must prevent any spray drift.
- Protect your plants from spray drift - if the spray gets on the leaves or bark it can seriously damage or kill young trees and hedge plants.

- Apply the chemical using one of the following methods:
 - a) A knapsack sprayer fitted with a spray guard. This is probably the easiest method of application, as the spray guard protects your plants against spray drift. If you don't have a spray guard you can still use the sprayer providing the plants are protected against spray drift.
 - b) A Weedwiper.
 - c) A hand sprayer containing Tumbleweed. These are readily available from garden centres but should be used carefully to avoid accidentally spraying of young trees and hedge plants.

If you don't want to do the spraying yourself there are a number of specialist contractors (see entries in the telephone directory) who would be able to do the work for you.

Providing the chemical has been correctly applied you should see the first signs of yellowing in the weeds within a few days. After this they will gradually go brown and eventually rot away.

If the weeds re-grow in the middle of summer you should consider repeating the weed control.

Mulches

Mulches can be effectively used to suppress weed growth and retain moisture. There are a number of different kinds - all must be at least 1 m in diameter to be effective:

- *Black Plastic* - If you use plastic it must be a dark colour that doesn't let light through. The mat has to be very well secured - preferably with soil or stones - to prevent it blowing away. Trees and shrubs supplied through the City Council's scheme will normally come with a supply of such matting. Weeds growing through the slits in the plastic and 30 cm either side of the matting should also be removed.
- *Coir and "Wulch"* - These are relatively new types of matting made from coconut fibre and wool respectively, which you may be able to buy from a garden centre. They will be effective for the first year but tend to disintegrate over a longer period and so become less effective. We do not currently recommend this type of mulch.
- *Bark* - This can be purchased from garden centres in bags or from a variety of bulk suppliers. Ensure it is composted/ rotted before use otherwise it can inhibit growth. It must be applied to a depth of 5-8 cm to prevent weed growth.
- *Well-Rotted Compost or Manure* - Providing this is well rotted it can be a cheap and effective mulch.

Hoeing and Hand Weeding

This is a very labour intensive and time-consuming method of maintenance that will have to be carried out regularly to keep the weed free base. Experience has shown that the use of chemical weed control or mulches produces better results.

How long do I carry out Weed Control?

The longer your trees or hedging have a weed free base the faster they will grow. Ideally we would recommend carrying out weeding until the tree or hedge is shading out it's own base. As a minimum we recommend three years weed control; after this the plants should be well established and should survive.

What Happens if I Don't Weed My Trees or Hedge?

If you allow grass - especially mown grass - to grow around your tree or hedge will probably die. At the best it will grow very slowly.

Other Maintenance Work

Trees and Trees in Hedges

Guards

Guards will need to be provided for your trees to stop them being eaten by rabbits and hares. They also provide some protection against voles and mice, but they are not there to provide support. You should check the guards regularly to make sure they are not rubbing on the tree and remove them as soon as they start to limit the growth of the trees in any way. For some of the shrubs such as goat willow and dog rose this may be as soon as 2 years after planting while for others, particularly beech and oak, the guards should be kept on for the full 5 years. After 5 years all guards should be removed.

Stakes and Ties

If you have any trees provided under the scheme they will need to be supplied with stakes and ties. These will give support to the young trees for the first 18 months while they have time to grow strengthening tissue. During this time they should be checked regularly to ensure the tree isn't rubbing on the stake and be adjusted if it is.

After the second growing season the stake and tie should be removed. If they are left on longer than this the tree will not become strong enough to support itself.

Pruning

Most trees do not require pruning. If you are growing specimen trees or trees specifically for timber they will require periodic pruning to form a single leader or to remove low branches. This should be done in mid-summer to allow the tree to grow healing tissue before the winter.

Watering

With good weed control watering is not necessary. Indeed watering can do more harm than good as it encourages roots to come up to the surface where they are prone to damage and drought. If you do decide to water you should soak each tree with at least 5 gallons of water at a time at very regular intervals.

Hedges

Management by Trimming

We recommend management by trimming, as this is the easiest way of getting dense bushy hedges. Hedges should be trimmed regularly to promote dense bushy growth. We recommend you:

- a) Cut back all of the hedge plants to 50 cm tall and cut back any straggling side shoots in the winter following the second growing season.
- b) Gradually trim the plants into shape in subsequent seasons, increasing the height by about 25 cm each year. You are aiming for an A-shape, with the base of the hedge wider than the top. The base of the hedge should always be a similar width to the height.
- c) Once you have reached the desired shape (we recommend at least 2 m tall and 1.5 m wide at the base) trim the hedge every 2 or 3 years keeping the desired shape. Trimming alternate sides each year can be very effective.

Management by Laying

Laying can be a time consuming exercise and leads to dramatic changes in the character of your hedge. If a new hedge is going to be laid it should only be lightly trimmed in the early years.

We recommend that you:

- a) Cut back any straggling side shoots in the winter. Leave the top of the hedge to grow.
- b) If the plants get to more than 2 m tall start to trim the tops. This will encourage the stems to thicken.
- c) When the diameter of the lower stems gets to 2-3 cm lay the hedge.

General Hedge Maintenance Tips

To get a thick hedge the key requirement is to getting the cutting regime right. However you should also be concerned about the hedgerow environment.

We suggest the following:

- Do not plough right up to the base of a hedge. The healthiest hedges have a grass verge of at least 1 m on either side.
- Keep grazing animals well away from the hedge until it is well established.

Where can I go for further advice?

The Wildlife Officer at Peterborough City Council is happy to provide more specific advice on looking after your trees and shrubs. The City Council also services a growing network of voluntary Tree and Pond Wardens who might also help with your ideas. The local Wildlife Trust (01733 294543) may also be willing to offer some assistance.

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