

Coppicing hedges for GLAS



Hedgerows provide a barrier and shelter for livestock, reduce the spread of disease and define farm boundaries. Coppicing is undertaken in a bid to rejuvenate overgrown hedgerows.

Deadline

Farmers in GLAS II have until 30 November 2017 to complete coppicing of designated hedges on their farm. Farmers involved in GLAS III have until 30 November 2018 to complete these works. A raft of GLAS inspections have recently started again, so it is important for farmers who have yet to carry out this work to do so as soon as possible. Farmers should also be conscious that inspections are front-loaded around deadline dates. Eoin Donnelly from the Hedge Laying Association of Ireland and Catherine Keena, Teagasc countryside management specialist, describe the best practice when coppicing a hedge.

Here, we have a section of the hedge that is yet to be coppiced. “Escaped hedges, where there is at least one stem per metre (such as this one) are ideal for rejuvenation by coppicing. However, coppicing must be carried out correctly to ensure no penalties apply,” according to Catherine. It is important that coppicing is carried out on the hedge that it is identified on the GLAS maps.

One issue that Department inspectors are reporting is that different hedges to the one originally marked on the map are being coppiced. Another useful tip is to coppice slightly more of the hedge than is marked on the map; this may compensate where there are large gaps in the hedge.

Circular saws

“The best advice that I would give to farmers who have never coppiced before is to get a machine in with a circular saw,” Eoin said. Get the machine to take away as much of the top of the hedge as possible and then you can get down and get into the remaining hedge by hand. Circular saws will generally only get down to 12in to 15in due to stones or wire being present in the hedge.

Clean out the undergrowth



The next step is for farmers to clean out the undergrowth surrounding the stumps thoroughly. If the hedge is only cut with a circular saw to 12in to 15in, then there will still be briars and brambles left in place. These will regrow over the stumps, resulting in gaps in the hedge as it matures. It is required that stumps are taken down below 15cm for GLAS, generally with the use of a chainsaw. “It is better to use a smaller saw that is easy to manoeuvre,” according to Eoin, “A large farm saw is not recommended for this job as it can be more dangerous.”

Rejuvenation

This is a hedge that has been coppiced correctly. “The mistake that a lot of people will make is that they will want to do the job quickly and only use heavy machinery. The problem here is that you are not getting down low enough. The idea of coppicing the hedge is to get it down as low as possible to allow rejuvenation from the ground up so you haven’t got gaps as the hedge matures,” according to Eoin.



Catherine recommends leaving occasional stems of whitethorn uncoppiced to remain as or grow into specimen trees, providing flowers for bees, haws and perching posts for birds. Having retained some ash trees, others which are not required as individual specimen trees should be coppiced and killed by painting glyphosate on the freshly cut stump as coppiced ash is not good for a hedge.

Plant replacements

When it comes to infilling of gaps there is no real option to plant on top of the hedge shown here. This is due to a dry root system in place on the bank. If you get a dry summer the hedge already there would have a mature root system and would take the majority of the moisture, resulting in the plant dying. For this reason it is recommended to plant replacement plants down along the front of the hedge, on the flat. Eoin recommends that holly, spindle or hazel plants are used to infill the gaps. He advises farmers to stay away from young whitethorn or blackthorn plants. "As the hedge starts to grow up, and it could grow 4ft to 5ft in the first year, then it will start to shade out small whips. If you could source two-year-old plants they would have a stronger root system. Otherwise, you will find yourself replacing these plants two or three times," according to Eoin.

It is important to infill gaps at a rate of four plants per metre where there is a gap in the hedge to comply with GLAS specifications.

GLAS

- ❑ Coppicing and laying of hedges can only take place annually between 1 September and 28 February.
- ❑ Plants that die during the year must be replaced during the dormant season.
- ❑ Newly coppiced hedges must be fenced off.
- ❑ Grass and other competing vegetation must be controlled.
- ❑ Plants must be trimmed over the course of the GLAS contract to ensure a dense hedgerow develops.

Source: Irish Farmers Journal & Teagasc

Click link below to view video:

Farmer know how: How to coppice a hedge.

<https://youtu.be/McJ7EZNP24w>

