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# 10 Reasons to Plant a Hedgerow

*Last Updated September 8th, 2021 by [Amy](#) — [15 Comments](#)*

The practice of growing hedgerows stems from at least the Medieval times of England and Ireland. Hedgerows can increase the beauty, productivity, and biodiversity of a property.

Discover 10 reasons why this age-old strategy is used on permaculture homesteads and how it can benefit your residential property.

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Rose Hips, photo by Nayuki via [Flickr](#)

## Ancient Hedge Laying

The ancient hedgerows of the English and Irish countrysides were used as property boundaries, defense barriers, and livestock paddock dividers. Traditional hedge laying is a serious skill, one that has been largely lost over time.

These old hedgerows were impenetrable and required a lot of maintenance. After World War II, skilled laborers were in short supply, and hedgerows largely became unruly. Lack of labor coupled with the industrial farming boom, landholders sought to eek out every inch of production, and hedgerows began to disappear.

[Check out these pictures](#) to marvel at the ancient works of art.

A few discoveries were made as the hedgerows vanished: There was more soil erosion, more pests, more wind, more dust, and far less biodiversity. In areas without heavy tree

cover, hedgerows had become essential wildlife corridors.

According to the [Royal Society for the Protection of Birds](#),

“ Hedges may support up to 80% of our woodland birds, 50% of our mammals and 30% of our butterflies. The ditches and banks associated with hedgerows provide habitat for frogs, toads, newts and reptiles.”

Since the 1930s, there has been some interest in the U.S. due to assistance from the USDA shelterbelt and Agroforestry programs, but hedgerows haven't really taken hold as a standard practice.

The farm field hedgerows that were planted in the first 20 years of the program have been disappearing for the same reasons as their counterparts in England and Ireland, with similar decreases in wildlife diversity.

[This page](#) includes a more detailed history of hedgerows.



*English Hedgerow*

Photo Credit: [drinks machine Flickr](#)

## The American Hedge vs. Hedgerow

A hedge is a closely planted row of shrubs made up of a single-species.

It is commonly used along a fence line, property line, or along the foundation of a house. There isn't much imagination or creativity that goes into creating a hedge, because it is often made up of a single evergreen species such as arborvitae or yew.

On the other hand, a hedgerow is a linear strip of mixed plantings. Because of the nature of a mixed planting, it offers more beauty, diversity, and productivity.

Is a linear garden not for you? Try the [circle garden design](#).

## The Residential Hedgerow



Suburbanites (especially) are always looking for creative ways to mark off the boundaries of their properties.

That's because it's rare for side-by-side neighbors to share the same philosophies on pets, children, privacy, lawn care, and property use. Hedgerows are an exceptional way to mark these boundaries and create privacy.

Managing our edges is an important first step in [ecological property design](#), according to Geoff Lawton, Australian permaculturist. By defining our edges, we can better control what comes on our property, such as weeds, pests, wind, aerial chemicals, or water.

Below, I share 10 reasons to plant a hedgerow on your residential property, and be sure to check out [how to establish a hedgerow](#).

## 10 Reasons to Plant a Hedgerow

### 1: Beauty

Hedgerows can be an aesthetically-pleasing addition to the landscape. With a diversity of flowering and fruiting plants, what's not to love?



Photo Credit: [hardworkinghippy Flickr](#)

## 2: Water Conservation

Hedgerows conserve water by blocking the drying summer winds that accelerate evaporation. *(Did you know that more moisture is lost through evaporation on a cloudy, windy day than on a still, hot, and sunny day? Wind is the game changer.)*

Hedgerow trees and shrubs will catch and store water in their root systems, especially if they are [planted on contour](#), which is one of the reasons why crops near hedgerows tend to be greener.

This means that hedgerows are a great way to reduce your irrigation time in the garden.

## 3: Privacy Screen

Though it takes 4-8 years for hedgerows to become established, if designed properly for the site, they will eventually fill in the space and provide a nice privacy screen.

There's something different about being enclosed by a living fence of plants and trees. In my opinion, it's certainly more interesting to look at than a wooden privacy fence that could make you feel boxed in.

## 4: Food Production

Hedgerows can provide food for humans. A food-producing hedge is sometimes referred to as a fedge.

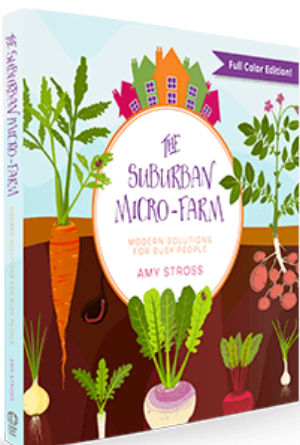
A hedge mimics the diversity usually found at a forest's edge, which is the most productive landscape for human-edible species. At the edge, we'll find a diversity of vegetation layers that take advantage of the convergence of prairie and forest.

We can design our hedgerow to be a fedge, chock full of perennial harvests for humans.

See: [How to Grow a Jelly Garden](#)

**Would you like to learn more about using perennial food crops to improve the biodiversity of your garden and increase yield?**

You'll find loads of information just like this in my award-winning book, [The Suburban Micro-Farm](#).



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## 5. Noise Reduction

Hedgerows can help buffer sound such as a nearby highway. For this purpose, a hedgerow should be planted as close to the source of noise as possible.

A dense hedgerow of trees and shrubs can help, but be aware the hedgerow is most useful for this purpose when the trees and shrubs have reached their fullest size.



*This hedge accomplishes so many things such as wind reduction and privacy. Add more layers to make it more bio-diverse or productive.*

Photo Credit: [jojo 77 Flickr](#)

## 6: Windbreak

Strong wind disturbs pollination efforts and stresses plants, thereby reducing crop yields. In windy areas, plants will put more energy into growing strong stalks and branches, and will have less energy to devote to flower or fruit production.

When a hedgerow is planted perpendicular to the prevailing winds, it can reduce wind speeds by up to 75% at distances up to ten times the height of the hedgerow on flat land,



according to [Jude Hobbs](#), an agroecologist, permaculturist, and hedgerow specialist.

So, if the hedgerow is ten feet tall, wind speed is reduced for a distance of up to 100 feet.

Buffering the wind allows you to create a calm inner environment that is comfortable for entertaining, sitting, or growing healthy crops. It can even reduce heating costs by up to 40%.

Place trees and bushes with fragrant flowers in the hedgerow, and you can help mask foul odors wafting in from nearby industry or livestock operations.

In flat land areas where wind can reach higher speeds, a windbreak can serve as a barrier to filter dust particles from the air and chemical drift.

A windbreak hedgerow can also prevent snow drifts, and with proper placement, could reduce snow shoveling time on your driveway after winter storms.

## 7: Soil Stabilization

Hedgerows are densely planted with a mixed species of plants that have various types of roots, all working together to stabilize the different levels of the soil. Water will be slowed down as it runs through the hedgerow, which will help to [reduce soil erosion](#) (eroded topsoil is America's #1 export!).

## 8: Wildlife Corridor

Hedgerows are linear nature preserves, providing much needed nesting, forage, and shelter for mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians.

In fact, they can restore habitat that is often missing in suburban subdivisions where land has been stripped of most of its trees, shrubs, and natural bodies of water for development.

One of the most common habitats to disappear is that of the edge—where the forest meets prairie.

That's because wild edges tend to be weedy and unruly, which is not considered aesthetically pleasing. At the edge of two ecosystems, however, is where you'll find the most diversity of plants and animals, which is why hedgerows are so essential.

Hedgerows mimic edge habitat and can be designed for residential landscape aesthetics.

While a hedgerow is getting established, you might consider adding birdhouses, bird feeders, and bird baths to begin attracting new residents.



*Lots of shelter for wildlife in here.*

Photo Credit: [hardworkinghippy Flickr](#)

## 9: Beneficial Insects & Pollinators

Hedgerows can support a diversity of insect species. If you'd like to see more beneficial insects patrolling your garden or more pollinators coming in for a visit, **a hedgerow can do more than a wildflower planting all by itself.**

That's because mixed hedgerows consist of trees, shrubs, and ground covers in addition to herbs and wildflowers, all of which flower and fruit at different times and provide a variety of options for pollen, nectar, food, and shelter.



More leaf litter increases habitat for important insects, and more insects may increase the bird and bat populations. Butterflies are also attracted to hedgerows for protection.

If increasing biodiversity is important to you, a hedgerow will catapult your efforts.

## 10: Riparian Zone Buffer

Riparian zones are the land areas along bodies of freshwater such as creeks, ponds, lakes, and rivers. They include the floodplain zones as well as the sloped banks of the waterway.

Riparian zones are home to many (endangered) species of wildlife and are also essential for filtering out soil particles, organic matter, agricultural chemicals, and other manmade pollutants before rainwater collects in these bodies of freshwater.

Unfortunately, modern agricultural and development policies often insist on stripping riparian zones of useful species for short-term monetary gain. This practice has contributed to the large dead zone we now have in the Gulf of Mexico due to agricultural and industrial runoff.

If you live on the edge of a body of water, even a small creek or stream, a hedgerow of riparian-appropriate species could positively impact the health of the water as well as increase wildlife habitat.



*Riparian buffer planting. Increase biodiversity here by planting more than just trees!*



Photo Credit: [Snohomish Conservation District Flickr](#)

# Hedgerow Summary

Hedgerows are a boon for residential homesteads where privacy, healthy gardens, beauty, and biodiversity merge. Hedgerows help manage the edges of your property to control weeds, pollution, erosion, and wind.

Now you're ready to learn [how to plant a hedgerow!](#)

## Other Resources:

- [Restoration Agriculture: Real World Permaculture for Farmers](#)
- [Edible Forest Gardens, Vol. 2: Ecological Design and Practice for Temperate Climate Permaculture](#)
- [The Hedgerow Cookbook](#)

**Have you planted a hedgerow? What plants did you include?**

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*Tagged With: [Edible Landscaping](#), [Permaculture Gardening](#).*

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## COMMENTS

Miss Bee says

[March 14, 2015 at 12:46 pm](#)

I really enjoyed this post. The Irish hedgerows are so pretty. Who knew you could do something like that.

[REPLY](#)

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Kami says

[March 15, 2015 at 3:08 pm](#)

Thank you so much for covering this topic, Amy! I can't wait to see part 2.

I am pondering my own hedgerow for privacy and as a chemical block from potential lawn treatments and scented laundry from the neighbors. I'm thinking about what trees and shrubs I should use. It will be difficult to wait the years for it to become established. I love the idea of using birdhouses and feeders early in the hedge's life. Maybe some tall flowers along the property line can help block to some extent while the trees and shrubs are small?

[REPLY](#)

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[Amy](#) says

[March 16, 2015 at 8:58 am](#)

Tall flowers are a great solution for filling in the spaces until perennials grow up. I'll cover some more ideas in part 2 😊

[REPLY](#)

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barbara funk says

[March 16, 2015 at 2:30 pm](#)

have a rather large hedge across the back masking a chain link fence very boring  
looking forward the next blog

[REPLY](#)

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Michael says

[March 16, 2015 at 4:10 pm](#)

I've been around homesteading as an idea all my life, but moved to the suburbs for various reasons, but that makes "homesteading" difficult. I've been reading like crazy to figure out how to



plan and plant a functional hedge, so I'm stoked to hear more! Keep it coming!

[REPLY](#)

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[Paula Bruno](#) says

[March 16, 2015 at 7:47 pm](#)

I found this very interesting. I've been thinking about planting a hedgerow between me and the neighbor as part of my erosion control efforts. I don't see it happening this year, but maybe next winter will be a good time. I'm looking forward to next week's article!

[REPLY](#)

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[Green Bean](#) says

[March 17, 2015 at 12:19 am](#)

I love this post so much! I have an existing hedge but have been adding native, wildlife attracting plants to it whenever part of the hedge dies out. I've also layered shrubs and ground cover in front of it. This is the first year with all the new plants so fingers crossed everything grows quickly and fills in. I have such hope for my new hedgerow.

[REPLY](#)

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[Amy](#) says

[March 17, 2015 at 9:23 am](#)

Your new hedgerow sounds lovely and functional. I would love to know what species of plants you decided to use. I hope it fills out quickly 😊

[REPLY](#)

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Jill says

[July 4, 2016 at 11:54 am](#)

I love my hedgerows of Japanese Neroli and one of clumping Bamboo.... both great for noise buffer as well as privacy! The incorporation of Passion flower vines ,Beauty Berry Roses and Jasmine make it an old fashioned garden of sorts. That is to say, which ever direction the wind blows or the eye wanders, there is a delightful fragrance and color to catch the senses.

Great Post... I hope more endeavor to enhance their home with these great ideas!

[REPLY](#)

Laura says

[April 28, 2017 at 11:17 am](#)

I am planting a native suburban hedgerow, still in infancy, but steadily growing. Shrubs include Serviceberry, Nannyberry, Purple Flowering Raspberry, Bayberry, Carolina rose, Climbing rose (setigera), and Low-bush blueberry. Native flowers on my property side too. I am hoping my little hedgerow will also provide much needed protection for birds and wildlife from deadly neighbourhood cats. I plan to add Elderberry and Buffaloberry (shepherdia canadensis) too. Great article! I am only a few years into my native planting, but the insect activity and biodiversity is marvellous. We've even had a toad settle into our little suburban property.

[REPLY](#)

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[Amy](#) says

[May 10, 2017 at 9:00 pm](#)

This sounds wonderful! Build it and they will come 😊

[REPLY](#)

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Eu Sei says

[September 13, 2017 at 9:04 am](#)

You wanna talk about “decreases in wildlife diversity” bullshit? I'll give you an example. We live in an urban area, between two cities—one small, the other larger. There are little fields/farms all over the place, with all kinds of things—corn, soy, pumpkins, flowers, apples, grapes, etc. No darn hedgerows. Yet, all kinds of “wildlife” cross our backyards—destroying flowers and eating any vegetables we dare planting! Deer, hedgehogs, bunnies, even coyotes! So, I guess we don't need hedgerows to have your precious “wildlife” trampling all over our yards and fields! The world is now populated by too many tree-huggers, who are putting their idiotic notions before humans. Get a grip, weirdos!

[REPLY](#)

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GreenHearted says

[April 29, 2020 at 4:36 pm](#)

Amy, it seems, has wisely decided to ignore this comment. But it warrants a response. Your gardens are an invitation to an easy meal for all the other species you mentioned — because all the gardens, yards and fields you “dared to plant” are built on what was once their territory, their habitat, their home. Perhaps have a little compassion for them, maybe take a course in ecology, and definitely build a fence. Bam, you'll get to be a happy gardener again.

[REPLY](#)

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Sarah says

[April 3, 2018 at 4:12 pm](#)

I just started a short hedgerow this spring. My state's department of conservation (many states do this) offers cheap seedlings in bulk. I planted hazelnuts, hawthorns, elderberries, ninebark, blackberries, arrowwood viburnum, bush clover, witchhazel, and pawpaws. When they grow up a bit, I'll plant some perennial flowers and ground cover underneath, provided I can keep the deer and rabbits off them.

[REPLY](#)

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Amy says

[April 16, 2018 at 12:57 pm](#)

That sounds wonderful!

[REPLY](#)

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**Hi, I'm Amy!**



I'm the author of  
*The Suburban Micro-Farm:  
Modern Solutions for Busy People.*

Join me as I share my permaculture  
gardening adventures in the suburbs.

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