

Cypress hedges



Leyland cypress trees are known for growing quickly into big trees. It is this fast growth that makes them popular for creating a robust hedge that establishes quickly. But that same rapid growth can also lead to problems. Lack of regular maintenance can lead to a giant unruly hedge which may not be welcome in an urban environment.

Often we are impatient and want quick results. But by allowing a little more time and planting a slower growing species, much time and expense in maintenance could be saved in the long run.

This note provides advice if you have a cypress hedge in your garden, are thinking of planting one, or would like information about what to do about a neighbouring problem hedge.

Planning a New Cypress Hedge

If you are really sure you want a cypress hedge, remember to think ahead and try to imagine the impact your hedge may have on nearby buildings, structures and gardens.

Before planting, think about the ultimate height, length and width you want your hedge to be. The height of the hedge is important, as if it is to be over 2.5m tall, you may have to regularly employ a professional tree surgeon in order to maintain it.

In positioning your hedge, you should consider where shadows cast by the hedge will lie and if they will block your light or that of any surrounding properties, and if your hedge is close to a path, driveway, or small walls, these could possibly be damaged by the hedge.

A large hedge may have an adverse effect on the soil conditions adjacent to it, making it difficult to grow grass or other plants.

Maintaining a Cypress Hedge

The key to a successful cypress hedge is regular maintenance. Aim to prune your hedge at least twice a year.

If you choose to attempt the job yourself, ensure you use the right tools and do the job safely. Working at height can be hazardous, particularly when using power tools. It is better left to a trained professional who has appropriate protective equipment for working in trees safely.

As a general rule, when your hedge reaches about 1m lower than the final height you want it to be, trim back the leading shoots and side branches. Giving the hedge an 'A' shaped profile will allow light to the bottom and help keep it green.

Hedges that have grown too tall or too wide can, unfortunately, be very difficult to manage. If your hedge has grown too tall, cut it back about half a metre below the height you require. Cypress hedges will generally tolerate their height being reduced by up to a third, but the results may not be particularly attractive. When it comes to the width of your hedge, it is best to try and control this from early on as a severe reduction in width can leave unattractive brown areas that won't re-grow.

If you cut your hedge back too severely it could end up dying. Sometimes the only practical solution for an overgrown hedge is to remove it and start again.

Pro's and Cons

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| ✓ Fast growth – cypress hedges can double their size in the first year. | ✗ Frequent maintenance is needed – this can be expensive. |
| ✓ Cheap, reliable, hardy and readily available. | ✗ Problems of excessive shading and loss of views could arise if the hedge gets too big – not just for you, but for your neighbours too. |
| ✓ Dense foliage creates a visual barrier. | |
| ✓ Larger hedges can make very good nesting sites for birds and other wildlife. | ✗ It is difficult to bring overgrown hedges back under control without making them unsightly. |

Evergreen alternatives to cypress hedges would include Box, Holly, Privet, Yew, Barberry, or Laurel. Deciduous alternatives might include Beech, Hawthorn, Hornbeam, or Field Maple.

Problem Hedges

Hedges and trees can be a cause of disputes between neighbours. Often the quickest and easiest way to deal with a problem hedge is through diplomacy and courtesy. The hedge owner may be happy to prune or remove the hedge if you have a friendly chat with them, letting them know of your concerns, or you could invite them into your home so that they can see things from your side of the hedge. Sometimes offering to contribute to the cost of the work can help smooth the way too.

If the hedge owner won't talk to you, or you are nervous about speaking to them, send a polite letter describing the problems caused by the hedge and how these affect you. If diplomacy fails, why not consider mediation with the help of the Community Safety Team who offer a free mediation service that could help you work out an agreement that both sides are happy with. You can contact them on 01429 523100.

Ultimately, should all attempts at negotiation fail; the Council may be able to intervene. The Council will not negotiate or mediate between neighbours but will adjudicate on whether the hedge is adversely affecting the reasonable enjoyment of the complainant's property. The Council will expect complainants to have tried everything they reasonably can to settle the dispute, and will take account of all relevant factors including the hedge owners amenity and that of the wider area.

If they think it is justified, the Council may order a hedge owner to remedy the problem, for example by reducing the height of the hedge and maintaining it at the lower level.

Hedges and the Law

- Landowners have the right to plant and keep trees and hedges.
- Permission isn't required to plant trees or hedges, except in rare cases.
- There is nothing in law that says all hedges must be cut to 2 metres.
- The law on high hedges does not include single or deciduous trees.
- An adjoining landowner has the right to prune branches or roots back to their boundary unless the tree or hedge is covered by a tree preservation order, situated within a conservation area or subject to planning conditions. However you may be liable for criminal damage if any pruning work that you do, or ask others to do for you, causes the tree or hedge to die or become dangerous.

Further Information

Leaflets:

Over the garden hedge - DCLG

High hedges – Complaining to the Council - DCLG

Protected trees – A guide to tree preservation procedures - DCLG

Websites:

www.hedgeline.org

www.communities.gov.uk

www.hartlepool.gov.uk

If you would like any further advice regarding high hedges please contact:

Landscape Planning & Conservation
Planning Services
Civic Centre, Victoria Road,
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Email: landscape.planning@hartlepool.gov.uk