

EGS Term 2 Hedging Project. January 2020.

Whilst flowers and shrubs within herbaceous borders always get the gold stars, the backbone of any garden are the hedges. John Lunn explores how to get the edge when it comes to approaching this subject.

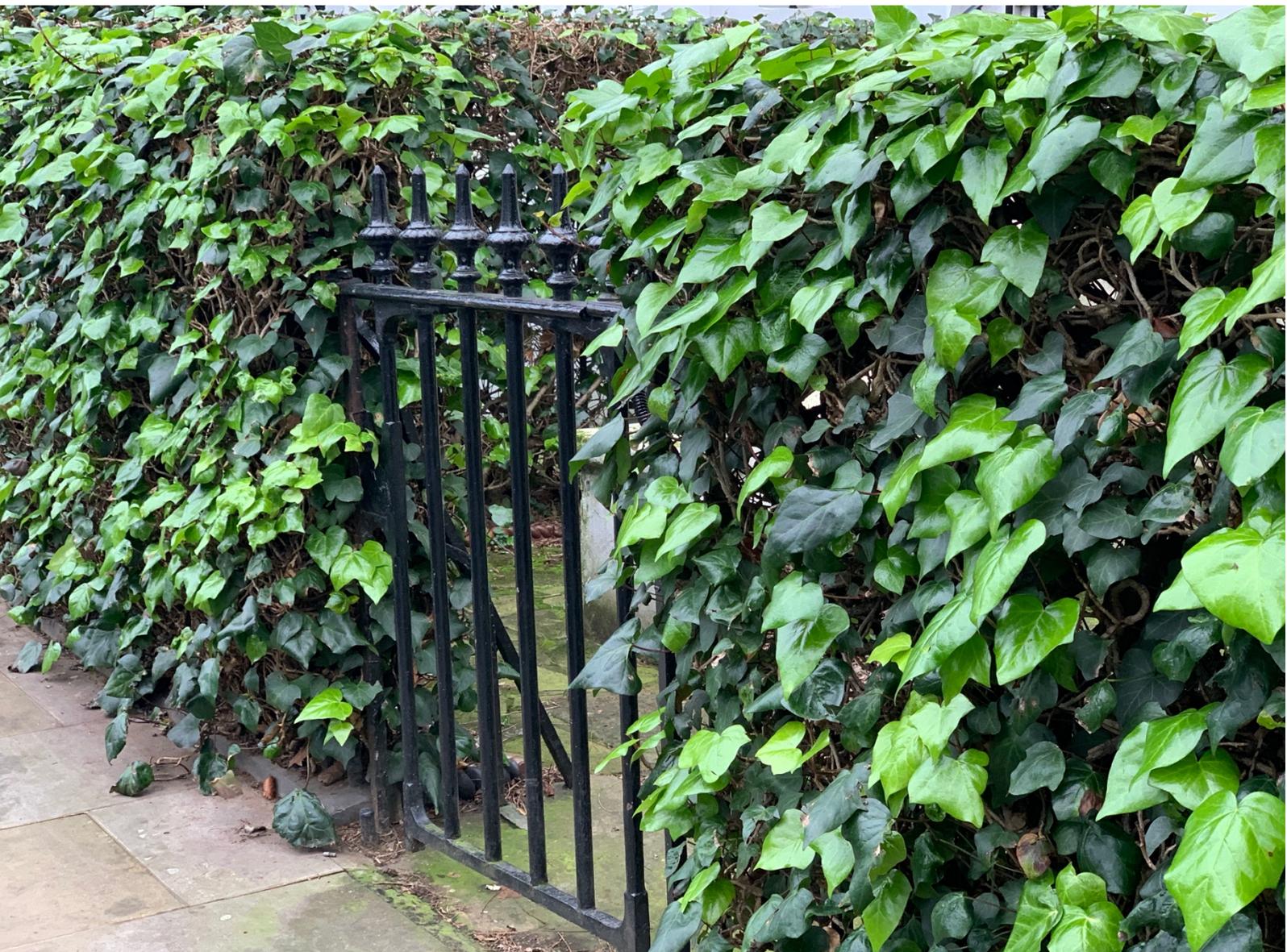
Edging ahead with Hedging

WORDS JOHN LUNN PHOTOGRAPHS JOHN LUNN



Below left: Winter scene at Manor Farmhouse, East Sussex showing the middle garden, with the deciduous *Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea' (purple beech) hedge separating the potager from the garden and *Quercus ilex* (holm oak) pleached hedge.

Below right: *Hedera helix* (ivy) hedge in Launceston Place, West London, bringing colour to a January morning, 2020.



Take any gardening magazine off the shelf and you will often find a colourful front cover of flowers, with articles on how to create your own mini Great Dixter in your patch of land – big or small.

Whilst flowers and shrubs get the gold stars, if you look at any successful garden more often than not the real stars providing the framework for the flowers to shine are the hedges. Often called the ‘bones’ of a garden, hedges provide the stage for everything else to perform.

The lines provided by hedges have been part of the landscaping world since gardens have been made. Excavations of the Roman village at Fishbourne Place in Sussex found evidence of box hedging within the formal structure, and we know the medieval monasteries had formal garden structures with hedging.

There are many different styles of hedges and types of edging plants. Christopher Lloyd claims in his seminal book ‘the well-tempered garden’ that ‘more glaring mistakes must be made by gardeners on the subject of hedges than in any other gardening department’. So let’s unpick this subject with some ideas and examples.

When I look at a new garden, one of the first areas I focus on is where the hedges will go. There are two great reasons for this – firstly hedges provide the structure and platform for the whole garden. Secondly, hedges can take time to mature, so it makes sense to plant them in the ground as soon as possible. Typically hedges can be deciduous (losing their leaves in winter), flowering or evergreen. Each type has its own characteristics to consider when planning out the garden structure.



Below left: Close up of the *Fagus sylvatica* 'Purpurea' (purple beech) hedge separating the potager and main garden in summer 2019, planted in the previous Autumn.

Below right: *Fagus sylvatica* AGM (common beech) hedge in the front garden at Manor Farmhouse, planted in the Autumn 2016. Maintenance so far has been restricted to very light clipping.



Deciduous, typically *Fagus sylvatica* AGM (beech) or *Carpinus betulus* AGM (hornbeam) can be persuaded to hold their leaves if clipped in the summer and provides a rich brown colour through the winter season, which then bursts into live in spring returning to green (or purple in the case of purple beech).

Flowering hedges, like a rose or a lavender hedge, can provide colour at certain times through the year whilst evergreen – typically yew and box but can also include ivy – provides all year-round colour and structure. Roses make colourful informal hedges and its combination of rich purple-crimson flower colour, powerful fragrance and general resilience makes *Rosa* ‘Charles de Mills’ AGM a good choice.

It flowers in June and July and is also helpful being almost completely thornless which is useful from a maintenance perspective. Lavender works well as a low hedge, and compact *Lavandula angustifolia* ‘Hidcote’ AGM is one of the best. At Manor Farmhouse, we have planted lavender as a small hedge in front of the espalier pear trees. An example of a flowering native hedge, hawthorn is one of the most valuable wildlife trees, and one option for a garden hedge is *Crataegus laevigata* ‘Paul’s Scarlet’ AGM. Another more radical choice is fuchsias, and one of the hardiest of all fuchsias, the scarlet and purple flowers of *Fuchsia* ‘Riccazonii’ AGM line the branches for months.



Below left: Newly planted *Taxus baccata* 'Semperaurea' AGM (yew) hedge on the top terrace looking towards Lewes, Autumn 2019.

Below right: The existing low *Buxus sempervirens* (box) evergreen hedging which provides a barrier between the borders and central courtyard. No new box hedging has been planted at Manor Farmhouse due to concerns about box blight and tree caterpillar infestation (*cydalima perspectali*).



Blackthorn, *Prunus spinosa*, is a familiar thorny native hedgerow shrub with clouds of white spring flowers and fruits like small plums. Evergreen hedges include yew, box, holly and ivy. Ivy is an option which can be grown up a fence and over time the ivy will act as a self-supporting barrier. Box hedging, *Buxus sempervirens*, is a well-known classic used as a low border and clips well. The challenge today is the impact of box blight and caterpillar infestation. The message across the gardening community appears to be don't give up on box, but use it sparingly. Yew is a classic plant for hedges providing a dense evergreen barrier which can be clipped, and we have planted yew hedging on the top terrace garden to create a new garden room.

Good drainage is essential with yew as it does not like roots being waterlogged. Land drainage can be a help here in clay soil, a good recent example being the yews planted at the new RHS Garden Bridgewater in Salford being designed by Tom Stuart-Smith. Another option is to plant yew plants on a 'ridge' to help drain water away. The key as explained by Roger Platts at the January EGS lecture, is to make sure water does not sit underneath the roots. *Ilex aquifolium* AGM (holly) is another option, and an example can be seen on one of the sides of Kensington Gardens. This provides a dense and strong hedge and works well from a security perspective in deterring anyone trying to get through – on the flip side it does make maintenance a little trickier with the spikes on the leaves, which requires sturdy gloves to be worn.



Below left: *Choisya ternata*
ACM hedging in Kensington
Square Gardens, London.
Mexican Orange Blossom
makes a beautifully lush
hedge, ideal for sunny spaces
and low hedging.

Below middle: Mature yew
hedging in the meadow gardens
at Great Dixter, summer 2019

Below right: Box hedging at
the beautiful Lilianfels Resort
and Spa, New South Wales
Australia, January 2016.



Finally, *Quercus ilex* (holm oak) is a great option in chalky free draining ground and has been planted since Roman times in the UK. It can be clipped like holly and provides all year-round green / grey colour in the garden. The height and spread of hedges needs to be considered in the design stage. According to the Christopher Lloyd for most hedges which will be around 2m tall, a thickness of 1.5m should be allowed at the base and the hedge clipped with an inward slope. Hedges will grow most strongly at the top, but a good base is key and needs to be encouraged at the early stages of growth.

On the subject of planting distances, the general 'rule of thumb' is three plants per metre with the exception being box, which should be planted five plants per metre.

The timing for planting deciduous hedging is from October through to March in the dormant season. Evergreen or semi evergreen hedges are best planted early Autumn (October / November) or March when there is 'warmth' in the ground. Hedges need maintaining, and need annual – sometimes twice annual – trimming. Key for maintenance is to shape the hedge to ensure there is a strong foundation at the bottom, with a gradual inward slope to the top. Finally, hedges need feeding every year, in late winter, using a fertiliser such as bonemeal which releases its nutrients slowly in the lead up to spring. Happy hedging!

USEFUL INFORMATION

Find out more about John's work [@thejohnlunn](#) □



Below left: Yew hedging in the redesigned courtyard of the Garden Museum, Lambeth, October 2019.

Below right: example of beech hedging at the Chelsea Flower show 2018, LG City Garden, Hay Joung Hwang.

