



CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE

BUILDING AND REPAIRING CORNISH HEDGES

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This document is the best practice method for the construction of traditional Cornish hedges and is regulated by the Guild of Cornish Hedgers. It has been created based on hundreds of years of knowledge, the in-depth experience of practitioners, and provides a guide to promote the highest standards of professional practice and the standard of work expected in the proficient performance of the craft. Where deviations from this code are requested by clients, the conflicting details should be agreed in writing before work starts.

Health & Safety

- A Health and Safety risk assessment document is available for download from www.cornishhedgers.org.uk and should always be complied with.

Planning

- Preference should be given to the **local traditional style of hedge** with any new hedge or hedging repair following the sequence of rows in any existing hedge. For repairs, existing stone and fill are considered the primary source of materials where usable.
- An average Cornish Hedge when new is 4ft - 5ft (1.22m - 1.5m) in height to the last stone course which is domed with earth, increasing height by up to 6 inches (15 cms).
- The base of a free-standing hedge is as wide as it is tall. The top width is less than the base width.
- Tree planting in a hedge should be avoided or if required minimal rooting varieties should be chosen such as Gorse.
- For repairs, existing stone and fill should be used. Gaps and ground cleared, and strings set between the sound parts of the hedge for a seamless repair. Stone checked, extra materials bought in as required from as local a source as possible. Any rabbit damage repaired.

Preparation

- Clear ground to below grass root level 2 - 3 inches (5 - 8 cms) deep and 18 inches (46 cms) either side of intended hedge width.
- Turf should be lifted by cutting down vertically to below root level, approx 2 to 3 inches (5 to 8 cms) lifted and rolled in shovel width sections and stored ready for use in topping the hedge.
- Set up profiles and string lines for the hedge.

Batter

- The batter, which is the profile of the hedge, is built in an inwards (concave) curve.
- The Guild of Cornish Hedgers use a specific Guild Endorsed “Former” for the batter and it is available for purchase from the Guild.
- If you are trained by the Guild this is the former you are taught to use and should continue to use in practice.
- The Guild former sets the top width of the hedge at 65% of the base width.
- There are slight area variations which occur across Cornwall and the variations occur due to the purpose of the hedge i.e. retaining hedge (*linchet*) or free standing hedge. If making a repair to an existing hedge use the Guild profile former and grade into the existing hedge.

Fill

- The fill for Cornish hedges is of damp **compactable** soil type of the locality (eg earth or rab) without stones peat, or vegetable matter.
- Sufficient fill is poured along the hedge centre for each layer, not more than 3 inches (8 cms) deep at a time. It is then dragged by hand, removing any plant life or small stones, to the back of each stone and **well compacted** which is essential.
- **IMPORTANT** - Stones can be bedded on fill but must have **stone-to-stone** contact on the **face edge**.
- Fill should not be dumped in or compacted by a digger bucket.
- When compacting fill be sure to keep an eye on the profile and string lines and ensure stones do not push out of line especially when soil or rab is wet.

Grounders

- Largest stones are used for grounders (foundation stones) and are seated into the cleared ground with their biggest and lumpiest side downward and good faces to the batter lines.
- Grounders are placed at the correct angle, interlocking with each other. The correct angle is obtained from the use of the Guild profile former.
- Stonier fill should be used in the middle on the **very base** and well rammed. Fill is rammed hard around each grounder in successive layers no more than 3 inches (80 cms) at a time.
- Grounders may only be laid on edge as facers (shiners), **providing support on top by long stones into the hedge**. No facer should be laid alongside another, but with ordinary grounders between.
- A stone bolt can be constructed through a hedge to provide necessary drainage.

Random Course/Filler Rows

- Stones are placed to even up gaps between the tops of grounders and the hedge built up to the height of the level line ready for the placement of hedgers.
- The level line should be at a height of no less than half the height of the overall hedge and run parallel to the ground.
- Stones are laid with their longest face running into the hedge, to create stability, slanting in at the same angle as the grounders then following the line of the profile former, levelling up ready for the next row. Stones are always placed to cover joints below - **no running joints**.
- Fill is well compacted around the back of each stone and in the centre of the hedge in layers not more than 3 inches (80 cms) at a time.

Hedgers

- **Three rows of hedgers** run from the level line to the top of the hedge and rows are horizontal to the run of the ground
- Hedgers in a granite hedge will be pitched, laid vertically, each row shorter in height than the row below.
- Hedgers in a Killas (Slate) Hedge will be laid Vertically or Herringbone. This is to ensure strength and stability as the hedge settles and tightens.
- Stones are laid longest edge running into the hedge.
- Herringbone/Vertical courses interlock with the row of stone below. Every stone fits together with the stones alongside and with the rows below and above, with no gaps.
- All stones are laid in contact **stone-to-stone on the front edge. There should be no loose stones.**
- Triggling (wedging a stone with a small one) is kept to a minimum if at all. It is always better to find another stone that can be fitted.
- A row of large projecting stones may be laid on the top course as coping stones to deter sheep or deer. No other stones protrude outside the line of the hedge face. This practice is **Rare in Cornwall.**

Dressed stones

- Use of a hammer is minimal for the grounders and random course section of the hedge. Hammer work is required to knock off an awkward projection to make a stone a better fit.
- Hammer work is often required to create the right sized hedgers.
- For high-specification Cornish hedges, the hammer may be used to give each stone a neat varying rectangular look to a **max of square.**

Vertical, Herringbone and Random Hedging Variations

- The code of Good practice is based upon building a standard Cornish Hedge given a mixture of stone sizes. If, as in some cases, the stone is of a small size - vertical and herringbone laying techniques should be used.
- Vertical or Herringbone work will start from the ground, following the hedging profile and using the techniques outlined above, under the section entitled Hedgers.
- The stone is sorted and graded by size. The largest stones should be at the base then all stone laid ensuring the average size of the stones diminishes towards the top of the hedge.
- Stones of all shapes and sizes are laid neatly and interlocking.
- Stones should be laid long ways into the hedge and not placed tracing along the hedge.
- For Random and Horizontal hedges the three top rows can be herringbone or pitched with the same methods applied as stated above under "Hedgers".
- **IMPORTANT** - *Vertical and Herringbone is always stronger than horizontal when building with smaller stones especially Killas (slate) stone.*

Topping off/Placing of Tubbins

- At the top of the hedge the fill is domed like a roof to run water off.
- Tubbins or turf removed during the preparation of the foundation should be used with any additional turf being sourced from as locally as possible and be between 2 to 3 inches - (5 to 8 cms) thick.
- Tubbins are rolled out on the top of the hedge, beaten down and pinned down with pins fashioned from nearby dead sticks. The gap between the rows of turf can be filled using rock trimmings and earth, which deters rabbits and grows over.

Planting

- Plants of native origin and local provenance are used if available. ***Shallow rooting plants only such as Gorse Etc.***

Clearing up

- Remaining stones and soil removed and the site left tidy.