

COMMON BEACH HEDGE MAINTENANCE GUIDANCE

If left unpruned, hedges start to look tatty and lose their desired shape. Beech and hornbeam put on two flushes of growth in the year – one main flush in spring and a second, smaller spurt in late summer. Ideally they should be cut back after each flush to keep them tidy.

After the summer growth spurt, deciduous hedges, like beech and hornbeam, need to be pruned before the leaves change colour and fall. September is the best month to do it.

Deciduous hedges are best pruned with secateurs, rather than with a hedge trimmer or shears. Their large leaves can turn brown if cut in two by rough trimming. Using secateurs to prune more carefully results in a dense and attractive hedge.

Here's how to prune hornbeam and beech in late summer or autumn.

You Will Need

- Secateurs
- Spring-tined lawn rake

Step 1

Assess the amount of new growth. It's easy to do: the current season's growth has leaves attached, while the old wood below is leafless. The top and upper sides of a hedge are exposed to lots of light, so they grow more vigorously. They need to be pruned harder than the lower parts of the hedge.



Assessing the hedge before pruning

Step 2

Prune back each shoot to two or three leaves from its base, using sharp secateurs. Cut at an angle next to a bud, with the lowest point of the cut positioned opposite and even with the bud, and the highest point just above it.



Pruning back each hedge shoot

Step 3

Work your way across the full width of the hedge, holding your pruning arm at right angles to your body so that you maintain a level top. Stand back regularly to check that the height is correct and even. If you find this difficult to do by eye, use a string line as a guide.



Pruning the hedge

Step 4

Remove prunings from the hedge as you go, so they don't get in the way. Once the top of the hedge is complete, it's easy to cut the sides. Start trimming at the top and work down, aiming to taper the

sides to leave the base a little wider than the top. You may find a bamboo cane useful as a straight line to cut to.



Removing hedge prunings

Step 5

Check the hedge and prune back any stray shoots that you might have missed. Rake up the leafy prunings and add them to the compost heap. Clip them into smaller pieces if necessary. They should rot down quickly to make a useful mulch to spread beneath your hedge next autumn.

