

Cancelled, Postponed, Cancelled...

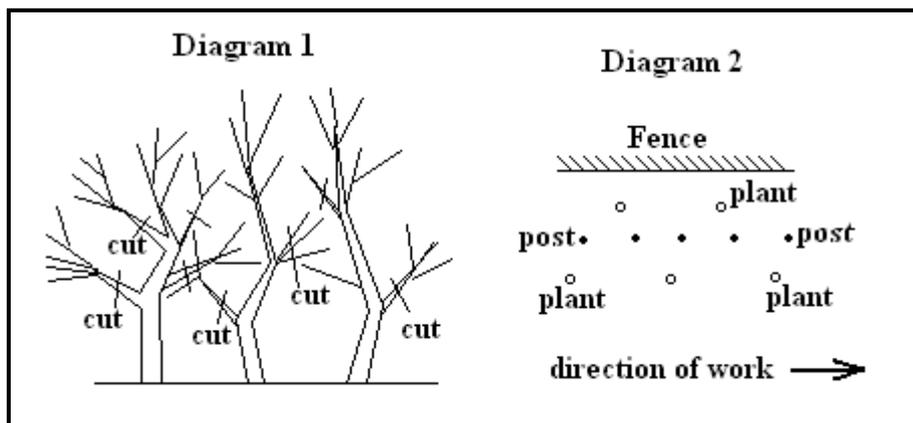
If you are feeling 'hard done by' with all this pandemic business I am not surprised. Trying to put work schedules together and then having the day cancelled is most frustrating to me, as it must be for you to look forward to a volunteers' day and then not be able to attend. I am beginning to think 2021 should be postponed until we have 2020 back to normal.

So, the December 27th work day was neatly filed as another 2020 non event and we have pushed on into the future. Simone and I did a little work laying the hedge on the 26th but the total did not amount to much. So, I thought I would take this opportunity to write a description of how to lay a 'Standard' or 'Midland' hedge so we all have more of an idea of what is involved. It will also make a useful reminder for future years.

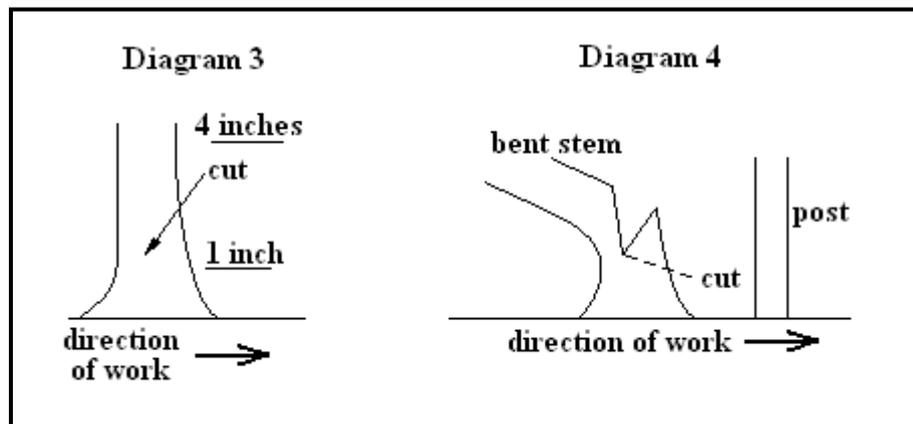
The technique of hedge laying is simple and easy to do but can require a lot of skill to make a good clean hedge. Our hedge was planted in 2008 and should have been laid in 2014 or so.

1/. It is vital that the hedge should not have had its top clipped for about two years as the height is required for weaving the stems between the posts during laying. The first task is to thin the hedge by trimming most of the side shoots back. This will make the laying easier later. The branches should be cut as close to the stem as possible so the stem does not become snagged during the laying process. (See diagram 1) this work has gradually been completed since September.

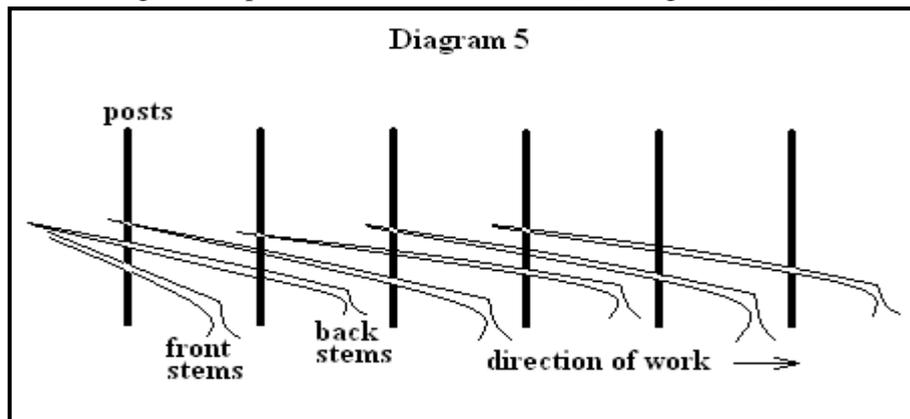
2/. Our hedge is two plants deep. The laid hedge needs posts to support it until it recovers from the damage we are going to do. The posts are driven in, either vertical or at an angle in the direction of work, between the rows and just in front of each stem. The posts should be driven in so they are self supporting leaving about three and a half feet above ground. If there is more, this can be cut off later when the hedge is finished. (see diagram 2)



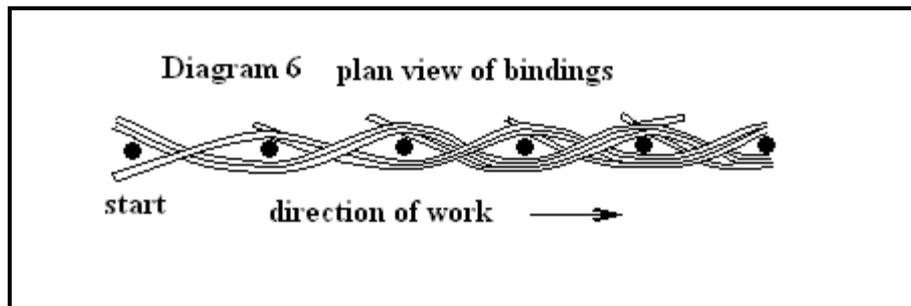
3/. The stems of the hedge are cut through, downwards at an angle, about two thirds through, to where they will bend over easily. The cut should be between one inch (25mm) and four inches (100mm) above the ground. A cut any higher than 4 inches will induce the plant to shoot too high up the stem and may lead to gaps at ground level (See diagram 3). The cut should be made on the side facing the direction of work so the stem can be laid towards the start of the hedge. Once the stem is bent over the protruding spike at the bottom must be cut away at an angle to stop water running into the cut. (See diagram 4)



4/. The stem is bent down and behind the first post from the side you are working on. If the stem is reluctant to bend over, the cut at the bottom may need to be deepened but take care not to cut all the way through. The stem is then brought forward over the previous stem and to the near side of the next post. The following stem will be laid in the opposite way. As you progress you will see the stems becoming almost plaited like a woven fence. (See diagrams 5.)

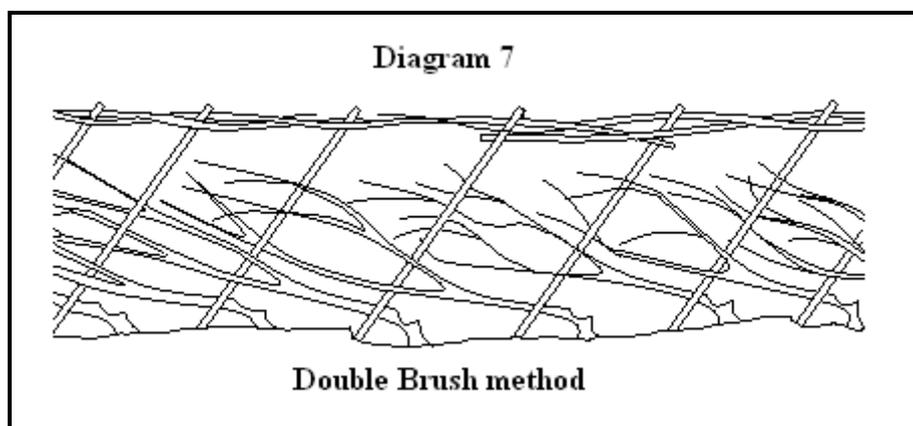


5/. Once the stems are bent down and platted for some distance the bindings can be applied. This is the most complicated part of the process. The bindings are made from fresh hazel or willow fronds and need to be at least eight feet long (2.4 metres). Two fronds are placed on the far side of the first post and twisting them together, should be brought round the second post and back behind the third post. A third frond is placed over the first two and on the opposite side of the first post and bound under and over the previous two fronds between the posts. As you come to the end of a frond another one is woven to the matrix so there is a continuous weave of fronds from one end of the hedge to the other. (See diagram 6)



Finally the hedge is neatened up by trimming straggly branches, and cutting the posts, at an angle, down to a couple of inches above the bindings.

There are many variations to this system and some of the choices one has when laying a hedge can make interesting patterns and have beneficial use for the waste material cut from the bushes. The method I really like is the 'Double Brush' laying from South Wales as shown on Countryfile this autumn (See diagram 7).



The hedge is trimmed and the stems are cut the same as usual but the stakes are driven in at an angle in the direction of work and the trimmings are reinserted into the hedge after laying, to help fill holes and replace lost plants. It makes a very dense hedge but still permits new growth as the dead material rots away. I think we will use this method on the other side of the fence when we come along the Orchard Meadow side of this hedge next season.

For more information of Hedge laying see the BTCV book 'Hedging a Practical Handbook' ISBN 0-946752-17-6. BTCV (the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) also have books on Dry Stone Walling, Fencing, Foot Paths, Sand Dunes, Tool Care, Tree Planting, Waterways and Wetlands, and Woodlands, all available from www.btcv.org/shop.

FHW NEWS letter

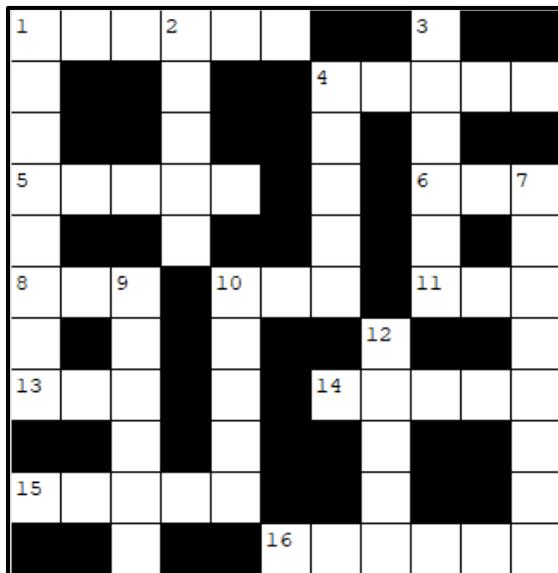
Now we can see that spring is on the way with the slightly longer days and some flowers already blooming. I noticed the cherry blossom was out at Waitrose back in November, and at about the same time my first primrose bloomed. The first daffodil opened in my garden on the 19th December and by Christmas there were a baker's dozen. In the wood the spring fungi have started appearing, particularly the very vibrant 'yellow brain' fungus (*Tremella mesenterica*). I wandered around the wood on the 27th December after the storm but no trees had been blown over though several branches had fallen across the path. The Wetland was full to the brim and all the ditches were in full spate. It has been lovely to see so many people using the wood this year, long may it continue.

Officially our next work day is January 31st if Covid doesn't stick its oar in again. See you at 09.30 in the car park. The same rules apply about drinks and biscuits, and about gloves.

Expect cold weather and mud.

Peter Prince

FHW Crossword No 156



Clues Across 1 & 2 Down. Favoured Welsh system for 4/9 Down, (6,5). 4. See 10 Down. 5. *Poaceae*, (5). 6. Space for scientific work, abbrv.(3). 8. Piercing tool, (3). 10. Enemy, (3). 11. Ear of corn, (3). 13. Heavens above, (3). 14. Mushrooms, (5). 15. Gold or green, (5). 16. See 10 Down.

Clues Down 1. Seven in Peter's report, (8). 2. See 1 Across. 3. Shrub, of the Ericaceae family, (5). 4 & 9. Constructing natural barriers, (5, 6). 7. Must be at least 8ft long, (8). 9. See 4 Down., 10, 4 & 16 Across. Required for 7, (5,5,6). 12. Bird manure, (5).

Solutions to FHW Crossword No 155

Across 1. Whips. 4. Five. 7. Adze. 8. Owls. 9. Oak. 12. Bee. 16. Over. 17. Fell. 18. Efts. 19. Brush.

Down 2. Hazel. 3. Storm. 4. Falcon. 5. Echo. 6. Tasks. 10. Leaves. 11. Holly. 13. Shrub. 14. Wren. 15. Nine.

Any News?

Items for the next Issue by
6th February, please to:

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