



Why You Need Hedgerows and How to Get Them –

Part 1

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Hedgerows are permanent plants that provide perennial habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects. Often planted on field edges or non-cropped “spare” areas, these are usually native shrubs and trees. Once established, a process that can take up to three years to accomplish, they are easy to maintain and provide drought resistant and often fire-resistant havens for the “good guys” that increase soil health and can enhance pollination services. Hedgerows are a win for the farmer and the natural biodiversity that provide ecosystem services to nearly every farm scenario – and here’s part 1 of the step by step process that can make this happen on your land. Stay tuned for part 2 – management and irrigation.

Step 1: Site Selection

Small margins of land directly next to orchards, row crops, and pastures are ideal for hedgerow habitat. If sites are long and narrow, a single row of plants or “hedgerow” will be installed. If sites are square or trapezoid-shaped, multiple parallel rows can be installed. In either case, sites are measured in linear feet. Sites will need to have access to irrigation in areas without summer rainfall. A linear design allows for easier irrigation layouts.



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Step 2: Site Preparation and Irrigation Installation

Weed Control Before Planting

Proper weed control is a crucial step that is vital to the success of establishing pollinator habitat. Ideally sites should remain weed free for 12 months before planting. A combination of foliar and pre-emergent herbicides, or repeated cultivation can be used to address both living and dormant vegetation. It is critical that applicators be fully aware that pre-emergent herbicides are carefully selected so they don't interfere with planting. Each site will need to be checked, at minimum, on a monthly basis. The site should be re-treated if new plant growth occurs.

Reduction of Existing Vegetation

Site preparation activities also include the removal of dead leaves, stems, and other plant material to prepare the site for seeding and ensure good seed to soil contact. If large amounts of plant matter persist on the ground, it may be necessary to remove the plant residue by raking. This activity should begin approximately 8 months before planting.

Irrigation Design and Installation

Installing irrigation greatly increases the chances of successful establishment. A drip system with emitters placed every 5 feet and a few inches from the base of each plant is sufficient. Install irrigation after site preparation has been completed but before planting begins. Much more on the irrigation design and installation is covered in Part 2 next month.



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Step 3: Hedgerow Installation

Fall is the best time to plant your hedgerow. In California, October 15th through November 10th will be the most likely time period in which growers can divert attention from harvest to planting habitat, and the native plant species can establish a deep root system before the hot and dry summer season that will start in 7 or 8 months. This is subject to change based on annual weather events.

Plants can be planted linearly to create a hedgerow or in a serpentine fashion which essentially create parallels of hedgerows. The recommended mix of plants contain species that have a wide range of sizes when they reach maturity. For the purpose of installing these plants in an efficient manner, each species will be categorized as large or small. The exact order or placement of each species doesn't matter as long as they alternate, small to large to small to large and so on. Plants should be spaced 5 feet apart.

Planting should occur as quickly as possible upon delivery. The black containers attract enough heat to kill plants within a day. If the project installation happens over multiple days, plans should be made to properly stage unused plants so they can be watered. Each plant should be carefully extracted from the container to ensure the root ball remains undisturbed. Turning the container over in conjunction with a slight shaking motion is often enough to dislodge most plants. Plants may need to be finessed out of the container with a trowel.

The size of each hole will be determined by the size of the plant. Each hole should be about twice the size of the plant's root ball. When planting into soil with a high clay content it may be advantageous to amend each hole with lighter soil that will allow for better drainage.

Plants can die in as little as 8 hours after planting so extra care should be taken to pre-irrigate each hole and/or irrigate immediately after planting. Dry soil will have a desiccating effect on the root zone.

There is more to think about with hedgerows – especially how to manage them efficiently. Tune in next month to learn about how to Manage hedgerows in Part 2! Got questions or need funding to establish your hedgerow? Contact bff@pollinator.org– we have answers!

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